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# Electric Insights Quarterly

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Electric Insights was established by [Drax](#) to help inform and enlighten the debate on Britain’s electricity. Since 2016 it has been delivered independently by a team of academics at [Imperial College London](#) using data courtesy of [Ellexon](#), [National Grid](#) and [Sheffield Solar](#). This report was written by third party authors external to Drax as part of the Electric Insights project. Drax and Imperial College London do not guarantee the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of this content.

# 1. Introduction

After twenty years of decline, Britain's electricity demand has turned a corner and is on the rise. Growing numbers of electric vehicles and heat pumps are the main driver, so this arguably marks the next phase of the energy transition: using clean electricity to decarbonise transport and heat. Demand is also poised to surge because of our growing appetite for AI, and the huge data centres it relies on.

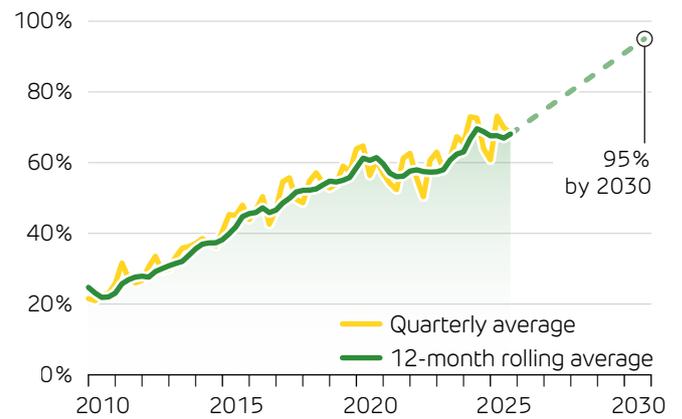
Despite rising demand, renewables supplied a larger share of electricity than ever. Output from solar, wind and biomass rose by more than enough to meet the country's additional demand. Alongside 2025 being the UK's **hottest ever year**, it was also **the sunniest** since records began, helping solar power to produce one-third more electricity than last year. Record renewables meant record system pain, with balancing costs and wind curtailment costs reaching new highs, and the debate about **'wasted wind power'** looming large. These challenges will continue to grow in importance, as the next CfD auction (AR7) awarded contracts to a **record 8.2 GW of offshore wind**. This is **enough to put wind back on track with Government targets**, but also enough to strain the grid even further.

The cost of energy continues to be a major challenge, with Britain's electricity bills among the highest in the world. **Ofgem's latest price cap**, which covers January to April, impacts this by raising electricity prices further while gas prices fall. This works against the country's clean energy ambitions, penalising electric vehicle and heat pump owners. We look at the 'spark gap', the ratio of electricity to gas price, which reflects how costly it is to electrify heat relative to sticking with fossil fuels. Britain ranks worst in our international league table, with the highest spark gap of any major country.

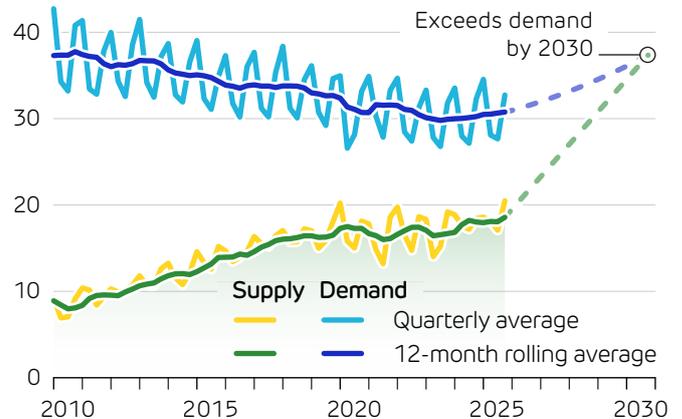
Global, interconnected fossil fuel markets are a key driver for our energy prices. Recently, markets have been unsettled by the **US military intervention in Venezuela** and unrest in Iran amid a **security crackdown**. In the longer term, analysts expect both oil and gas markets to see large over-supply this year, which could ease pressure on bills, but risks pushing up emissions around the world.

*The Government has set three Clean Power 2030 targets, covering the amount of clean electricity produced and overall carbon intensity. Progress towards these has been solid over the past 16 years, but has slowed down over the last four quarters for both clean electricity's share and carbon emissions intensity.*

**Share of clean electricity generation**



**(GW) Clean electricity generation**



**(g/kWh) Carbon intensity of electricity**



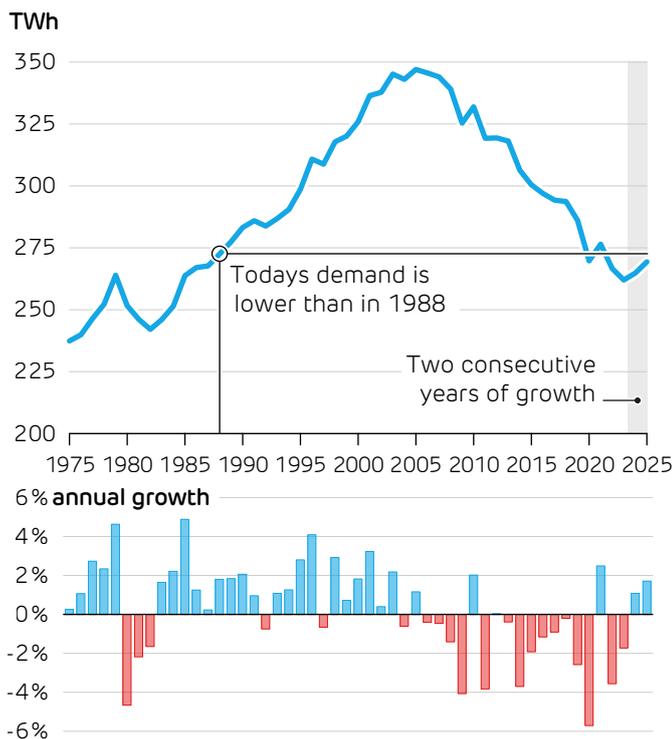
## 2. AI and data centres push up Britain’s electricity demand

Britain’s electricity demand has reached a turning point, seeing two consecutive years of growth for the first time in over 20 years. Since its peak in 2005, demand has fallen by more than a fifth – often seen as a sign of wider decline, deindustrialisation and outsourcing. [Now with Artificial Intelligence poised to reshape the economy](#), the data centres which power AI models have contributed to raising Britain’s electricity demand by 1.7% in 2025.

AI presents a major growth opportunity, [expected to boost UK GDP by £550 billion over the coming decade](#). Behind the [rapid increase in AI assistants](#) are data centres: [huge and power-hungry computer clusters](#) concentrated around London. They currently [consume 2.5% of Britain’s electricity](#), more than the city of Birmingham.

Britain’s electricity demand is also being driven upwards by electrifying transport and heat. [Electric vehicle sales grew by 27%](#) to reach 475,000 pure-battery vehicles plus 225,000 plug-in hybrids, meaning one in three cars sold in 2025 was electric. [Heat pump sales grew more modestly](#), by just 4%, held back by Britain’s high electricity prices.

*Britain’s annual electricity demand over the last 50 years.*

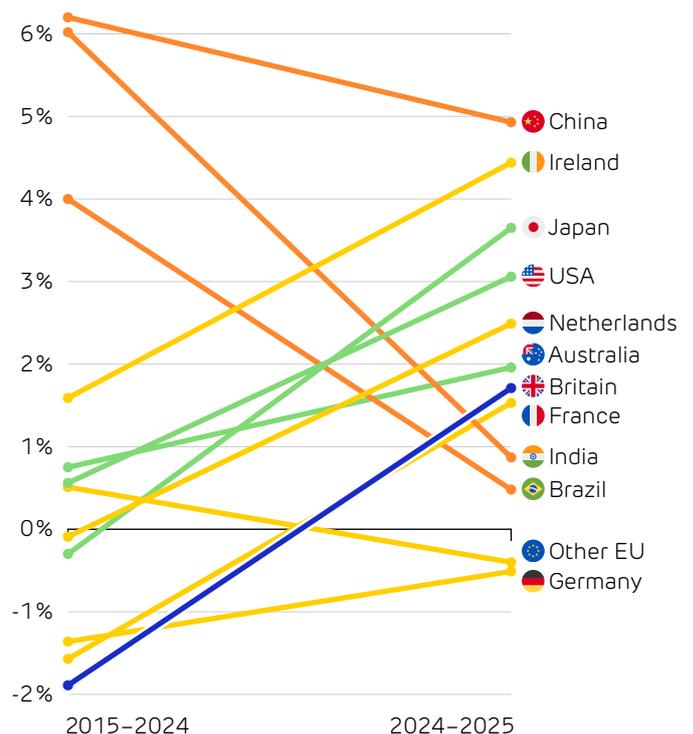


Data centres are growing much faster, already consuming [5% of national demand in the US](#), and [20% of Ireland’s electricity](#). This is wreaking havoc on electricity systems: American firms are [scrambling to build polluting diesel and gas generators](#) to meet growing demand, and [Ireland placed a three-year ban on new data centres](#) to protect consumers.

To sidestep these problems, the Government [launched five AI growth zones](#): areas with good grid connections, clean firm generation sources, and proximity to cities. Yet, with UK data centre demand [forecast to quadruple by 2030](#), more zones are likely to be needed to keep pace and [avoid stretching the grid thin](#).

Britain’s electricity demand has gone from falling faster than in any other major country, to now being middle of the pack. Britain’s turnaround is set to accelerate, as [the CCC targets rapid rises in heat pump installations and electric car sales](#). Building all-new infrastructure to power these new loads will be prohibitively expensive, but planning ahead to use off-peak hours and better utilise existing infrastructure around the country will help to avoid the grid from holding back progress.

*Growth in electricity demand last year compared to the previous decade across several countries.*



### 3. A record year for renewable energy production

Electrification is central to decarbonising Britain’s homes and cars. But this raises the bar for the power system, which must produce more electricity while making it cleaner. In 2025, renewables did exactly that. Output from wind, solar and biomass all reached record highs, growing faster than demand. For the first time, clean sources supplied more than three-fifths of Britain’s electricity, up from just one-fifth in 2010.

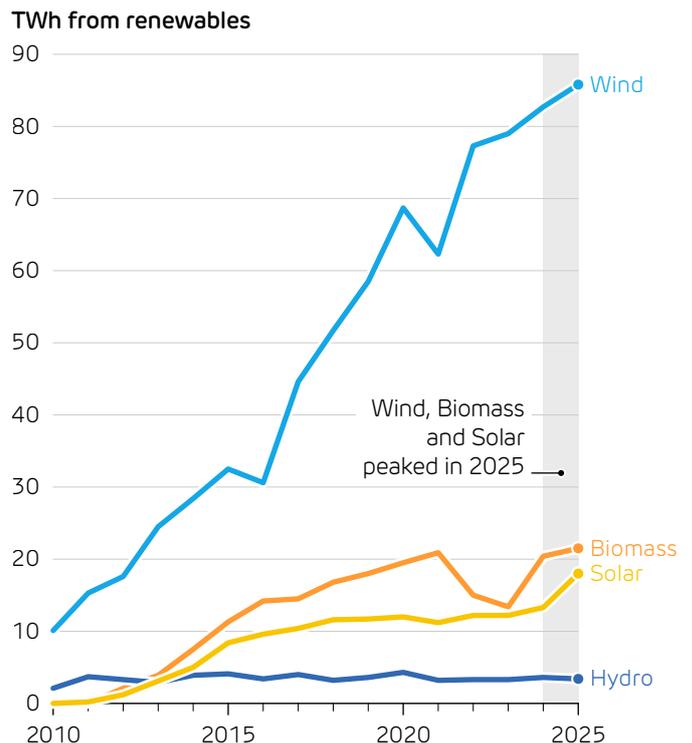
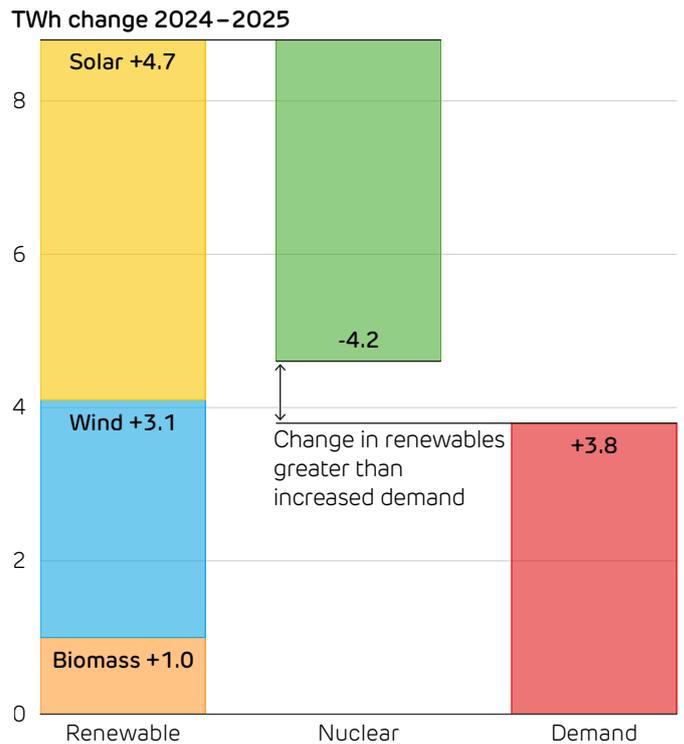
Solar power had an outstanding year, with output 35% higher than in 2024. New installations surged as Britain basked in record sunshine. [A quarter of a million homes installed PV in 2025](#), helping to push capacity up by 2.6 GW; the equivalent to two large power stations. The UK also enjoyed its [sunniest year on record](#), with over 360 more sunshine hours than in 2024.

More wind and solar output cuts emissions and improves energy security, but puts greater strain on system operations. The cost of balancing supply and demand leapt by more than 20% to £14 per MWh – adding one-fifth onto generation costs. Much of this is down to the record cost of curtailing wind farms ([£1.5bn in 2025](#)), which continues to fuel debate about [where new wind farms are built and how they should be supported](#).

Spiralling ancillary service costs points to the need for flexible and controllable clean power sources. Biomass also had a record year with output up 5%, but nuclear output slumped by more than a tenth to its lowest level since 1980. Britain’s nuclear fleet suffered [prolonged maintenance outages](#), alongside refuelling and unplanned shutdowns.

The focus is shifting from building clean power to orchestrating a clean system. Curtailment, congestion, and balancing are becoming as important as generation records. System flexibility will determine whether more clean output translates into lower bills and lower emissions. If grid upgrades lag behind, curtailment will continue. [Battery storage is Britain’s fastest growing source of flexibility](#) and arguably the quickest route to turning wasted wind into delivered electricity. As [gas power is phased down](#) and [nuclear stations reach retirement age](#), we will increasingly need technologies that can deliver clean power on demand, not only when the weather cooperates.

*Britain’s renewables supplied all the growth in electricity demand in 2025, even compensating for the drop in nuclear output. Three renewable energy sources supplied record amounts of electricity.*



## 4. Britain’s spark gap is holding back the electric revolution

Britain’s energy prices are fighting against its net zero ambitions. Using electricity to replace oil and gas is the biggest opportunity to reduce emissions and improve energy security. But instead, the people switching to electric vehicles and heat pumps are increasingly being punished with higher bills. [Ofgem’s latest price cap](#) pushed household electricity prices up by 5%, while cutting gas bills by 6%. This has made switching to clean electricity a bad deal for British households.

The ratio between electricity and gas prices, known as the spark gap, is now higher in Britain than any other large country. This means a modern heat pump which converts 1 unit of electricity into 4 units of heat would be more expensive to run than a standard gas boiler, despite producing 85% less CO<sub>2</sub><sup>1</sup>. The same heat pump in France or the US would cost half as much as gas to run – which helps to explain why [the UK lags behind in heat pump uptake](#). Heat pumps are the Government’s [main](#)

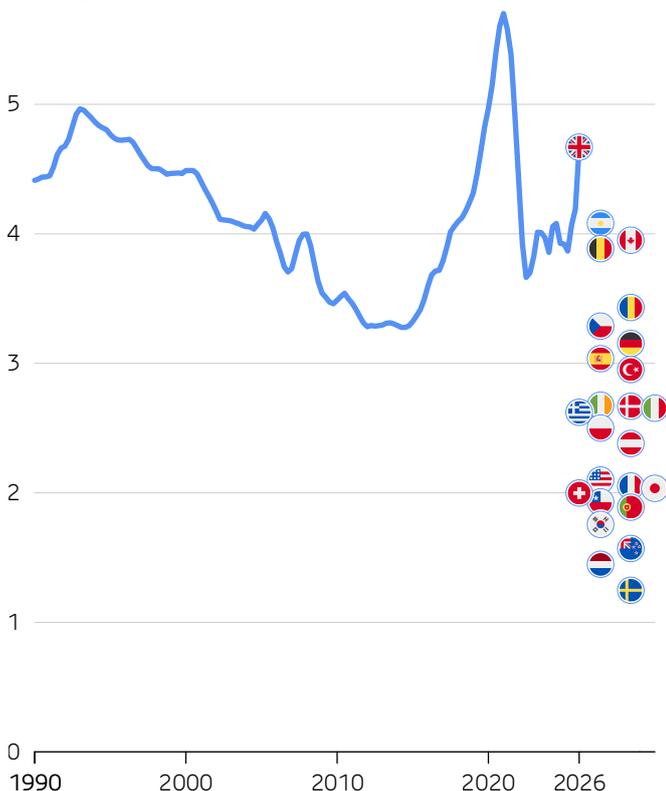
[approach to decarbonising buildings](#), but with [85% of UK homes still heated by gas](#), the fundamental economics need to change.

### Why is Britain’s spark gap so high?

Ever since Britain has had an electricity market, its spark gap has ranged from around 3.5 to 5 – always at the top end of the 25 major countries compared below. Two factors drive this: gas is relatively cheap for British households, and electricity is relatively expensive.

[In the 1990s, the UK had low gas prices](#) thanks to abundant supplies from the North Sea and limited capacity to export it. [In the 2000s, gas prices rose](#) as production declined, while fierce competition in electricity markets pulled prices down. Britain’s spark gap fell to a low of around 3.3, still higher than in most of the world.

Spark gap



[Britain’s spark gap over the last 35 years has remained well above the level in other countries. Electricity for households is now 4.7 times more expensive than gas, giving Britain the highest spark gap out of the 25 major countries compared which provide retail price data. In contrast, the spark gap in France, Japan and the US is around 2, while it is below 1.5 in the Netherlands and Sweden. Data from \[Ofgem\]\(#\), \[DESNZ\]\(#\), \[Eurostat\]\(#\), and \[IEA\]\(#\).](#)

- |               |               |             |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Great Britain | Ireland       | Switzerland |
| Argentina     | Denmark       | Chile       |
| Canada        | Italy         | Portugal    |
| Belgium       | Greece        | South Korea |
| Romania       | Poland        | New Zealand |
| Czechia       | Austria       | Netherlands |
| Germany       | United States | Sweden      |
| Spain         | France        |             |
| Turkey        | Japan         |             |

<sup>1</sup> With Britain’s average carbon intensity in 2025, a modern heat pump with COP = 4 would emit 30 gCO<sub>2</sub> per kWh of heat, compared to 200 g/kWh for a modern 92% efficient gas boiler.

In the second half of the 2010s, the spark gap rose sharply as decarbonisation policies were funded through electricity-only levies. The feed-in tariffs and Renewables Obligation that supported early renewables, Contracts for Differences that support large-scale projects, and carbon pricing now all push up household electricity bills, but leave gas bills largely unaffected. Other countries share the burden of green policies across both fuels, but in the UK [more than 80% of levies are paid through electricity bills](#), four times more than comes from gas.

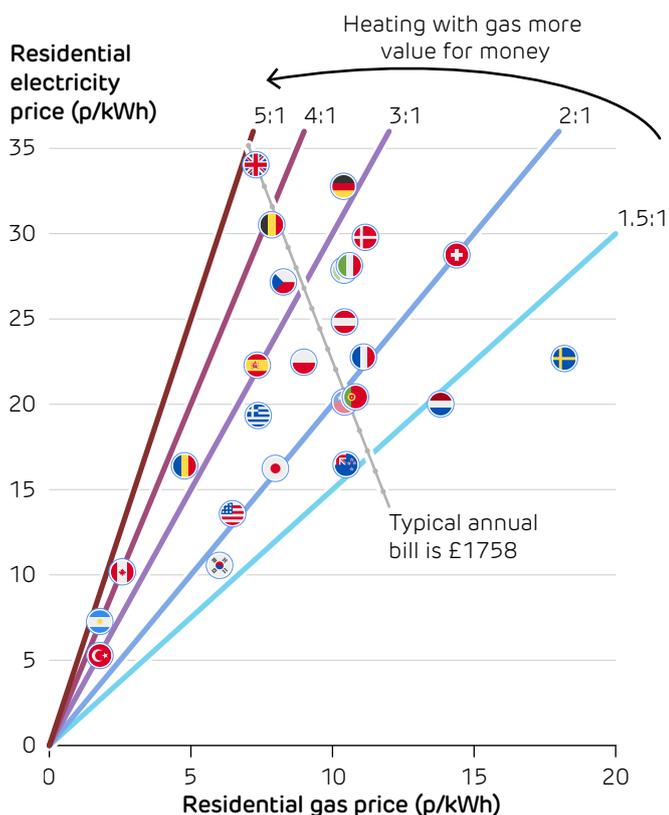
### How could we lower the spark gap?

The CCC propose to address this imbalance by distributing electricity policy costs more widely, acknowledging the fact that clean electricity is central to decarbonisation. Costs could move into general taxation, which would lower electricity bills but raise taxes elsewhere. Alternatively, they could be shifted from electricity onto gas bills. Even if such a shift did not increase average spending on energy, it would affect individual households differently, creating winners and losers. Given the continuing problems with fuel poverty, any changes must be carefully managed.

Policy changes for domestic customers, scheduled for April 2026, will see three quarters of the Renewables Obligation’s cost move into general taxation, along with an end to the Energy Company Obligation. This is expected to cut electricity prices by 3.4p/kWh and gas prices by 0.3p/kWh, reducing the spark gap from 4.7 to 4.1. This is an improvement, but still out of line with most of the world.

If Britain’s gas prices rose to the average across European and OECD countries (9.5 p/kWh), electricity prices could fall to 25 p/kWh to maintain the same annual household bill. This would put British prices between those of Poland and Austria, reduce our spark gap to 2.5, and make heat pumps and electric vehicles 30% cheaper to run.

Anything that pushes costs onto gas will be difficult, because it is so widely used for home heating. But if we want to decarbonise our buildings and reduce reliance on imported fuels, we need to stop taxing the solution and start pricing the problem: reducing the spark gap each year. Rebalancing levies so clean electricity is cheaper to use is the fastest way to make heat pumps mainstream.



The price of gas and electricity per unit to residential consumers, including taxes and standing charges. The ratio of electricity to gas price gives the spark gap, shown by coloured lines. Britain’s electricity is the most expensive out of the 25 large countries shown, while gas prices are slightly below the average. This gives Britain the highest spark gap out of all these countries, meaning electricity is penalised most strongly against gas. The dotted grey line shows a range of other gas and electricity prices that would deliver the same annual bill for the average household. Data from [Ofgem](#), [DESNZ](#), [Eurostat](#), and [IEA](#).

- Great Britain
- Ireland
- Switzerland
- Argentina
- Denmark
- Chile
- Canada
- Italy
- Portugal
- Belgium
- Greece
- South Korea
- Romania
- Poland
- New Zealand
- Czechia
- Austria
- Netherlands
- Germany
- United States
- France
- Spain
- Japan
- Turkey

## 5. Oil and gas in an over-supplied world

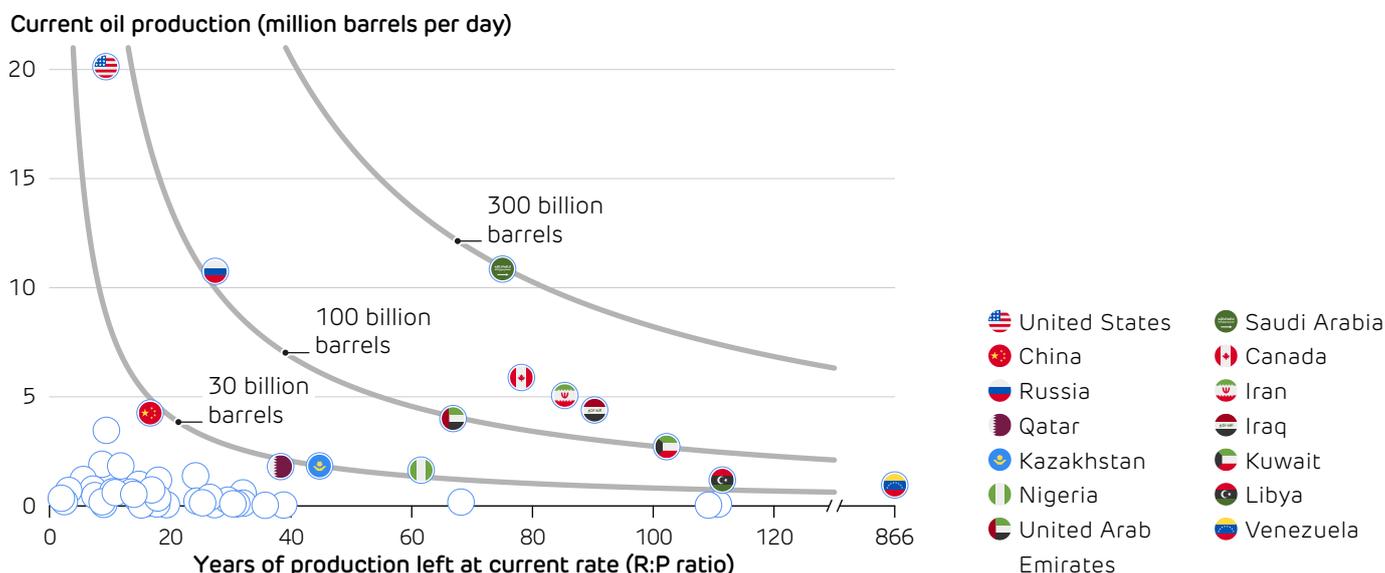
Oil is the [world's largest source of energy](#), and never far from the news. December and January saw global geopolitics flare up, with major disruptions in Venezuela and Iran. These short-term shocks mask the wider story of '[demand displacement](#)'. Renewables are displacing gas and coal burnt for electricity while electric vehicles reduce the oil needed for transportation. Looming oversupply of fossil fuels suggests that lower prices could be a prospect for this coming year.

### Speed versus stamina

The US is the world's largest producer of oil and gas. It supplies [two-thirds more oil](#) than 2<sup>nd</sup> ranked Saudi Arabia, and [two-thirds more gas](#) than 2<sup>nd</sup> ranked Russia. Their 'energy dominance' was driven by the shale revolution, where hydraulic fracturing – or 'fracking' – unlocked vast oil and gas resources trapped inside rock formations. This allowed US fossil fuel supply to rapidly expand, but their remaining reserves are now waning fast.

The ratio between a country's oil reserves and its production – known as the R:P ratio – gives an estimate of how long production can continue at current rates. The US sits at one end of the spectrum, burning bright for a short time. Venezuela sits at the opposite end, with the world's largest oil reserves but very limited production because of [chronic underinvestment and international sanctions](#).

*Speed versus stamina in the global oil market. The US is the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas liquids by a wide margin, but it can only keep up this pace for the next decade before its current reserves are exhausted. Other large producers, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Canada could continue producing at current levels until the end of this century. Venezuela stands apart from the pack, being able to continue producing at its current (reduced) rate until we approach the year 2900.*



## Short-term disruption

Recent geopolitical disruptions surround the global oil market. Venezuela is in a fragile transition after a [US raid in January captured President Nicolás Maduro](#) and [opened up Venezuela's oil sector to foreign investors](#). [Iran is experiencing widespread anti-government protests](#) with renewed US threats of intervention raising concerns about supply disruptions. These events contributed to [oil prices climbing 14% in January](#). If Iran's supply was lost from the market, [oil prices would spike by 30%](#) in the short term and as much as 60% by year-end, according to BloombergNEF. Oil is not directly relevant for UK electricity, as it is used for less than 1% of supply, but oil and gas prices tend to track one another. Changes in oil prices would be strongly felt at the petrol pump, and more broadly, oil affects inflation and the national trade deficit.

## Long-term excess

Short-term supply disruptions could give way to the bigger picture of falling demand. [Electric vehicles are saving 1.3 million barrels of oil per day](#), equivalent to Venezuela being taken offline. As sales are growing rapidly around the world, this is expected to quadruple to [5 million barrels by 2030](#). Oil demand has flatlined in the US since 2020, while the [UK's oil demand peaked back in 1973](#), and has since fallen 40%.

Much of the oil industry faces a dilemma: if we move into a [peak demand world](#), it is not clear who will buy all the oil currently being produced. One thing is clear – if we are to meet global decarbonisation objectives, much of the oil that we know about must be left in the ground.

The same is true for gas. Supply constraints in 2025 meant that [gas prices reach their highest levels](#) since the energy crisis of 2022. Booming liquid natural gas (LNG) [exports saw US gas prices rise](#), making coal-fired electricity more competitive, [increasing American coal burn for the first time since 2021](#).

## Impact on bills

A large new wave of LNG capacity is coming online in the next year, with [IEA](#) and [Reuters](#) forecasting a global glut. LNG export terminals are springing up around the world, with [LNG trade expected to increase by 7%](#). Gas prices in Europe and the UK remain more than twice as high as those in the US, so greater trade holds the promise of both reducing and stabilising prices in future.

Cheaper gas means lower energy bills to come, especially as [Britain's electricity prices are almost entirely dictated by gas prices](#). Volatility is a bigger threat than price level: one geopolitical shock can still send energy prices spiralling, which strengthens the case for a diversified electricity mix. Cheaper fossil fuels also raise the risk of undoing progress on reducing carbon emissions: any relief on bills should not be an excuse to lock in another decade of oil and gas dependence.

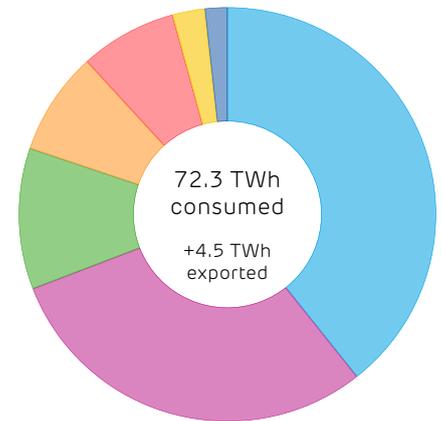
## 6. Capacity and production statistics

Britain installed 2.6 GW of new solar PV capacity in 2025, the fastest build rate in over a decade. [Several large solar farms were commissioned](#) enabled by more supportive planning rules. [Rooftop solar has also taken off](#) as panel costs fell dramatically, and new-build homes are increasingly arriving “solar-ready”.

By contrast, wind farm deployment is sluggish. Capacity increased by 1.1 GW during 2025, the weakest growth since 2022, and the third year in a row of falling build rates. Offshore wind is still feeling the effects of [higher financing costs and supply-chain disruption](#). [Onshore wind is facing even more of a lull](#), with only 0.1 GW of net growth during 2025. England’s planning rules for new wind farms were relaxed in mid-2024, but policy changes take time to translate into turbines being built.

The generation mix during Quarter 4 was greener than ever, with carbon emissions down 15% year-on-year. Every renewable energy source increased output, with wind, solar and hydro all rising by more than 20%, and biomass output up 6%. Nuclear and gas output both fell by more than a tenth, while electricity exports almost doubled year-on-year, helped by [the Greenlink interconnector](#) that has increased capacity between Wales and Ireland.

*Britain's electricity supply mix in the fourth quarter of 2025.*



	Share of the mix
Wind	39.3%
Gas	29.8%
Nuclear	11.0%
Biomass	8.0%
Imports	7.5%
Solar	2.5%
Hydro	1.7%
Coal	0.0%

*Installed capacity and electricity produced by each technology,<sup>1,2</sup>*

	Installed Capacity (GW)		Energy Output (TWh)		Utilisation / Capacity Factor	
	2025 Q4	Annual change	2025 Q4	Annual change	Average	Maximum
Nuclear	6.4	~	8.0	-1.1 (-12%)	57%	66%
Biomass	3.8	~	5.8	+0.3 (+6%)	69%	92%
Hydro	1.2	~	1.3	+0.3 (+29%)	48%	97%
Wind	31.5	+1.1 (+4%)	28.4	+4.7 (+20%)	41%	76%
– of which Onshore	14.9	+0.1 (+1%)	10.8	+0.9 (+9%)	33%	61%
– of which Offshore	16.7	+0.9 (+6%)	17.7	+3.8 (+28%)	49%	70%
Solar	21.6	+2.6 (+14%)	1.8	+0.4 (+24%)	4%	48%
Gas	27.6	~	21.5	-2.5 (-10%)	36%	91%
Coal	0.0	~	0.0	~	~	~
Imports	9.7	~	10.5	+1.1 (+12%)	49%	90%
Exports			4.3	+1.9 (+79%)	20%	63%
Storage discharge	3.1	~	0.4	-0.1 (-10%)	7%	60%
Storage recharge			0.6	-0.1 (-11%)	8%	93%

<sup>1</sup> Other sources give different values because of the types of plant they consider. For example, [Energy Trends](#) records an additional 0.7 GW of hydro, 0.6 GW of biomass and 3 GW of waste-to-energy plants. These plants and their output are not visible to the electricity transmission system and so cannot be reported on here.

<sup>2</sup> We include an estimate of the installed capacity of smaller storage devices which are not monitored by the electricity market operator.

## 7. Power system records

The last quarter of 2025 delivered another set of milestones for Britain's electricity system, with wind leading the way. On [27 October](#), wind farms came within touching distance of supplying three quarters of the country's electricity demand, and on [5 December](#) their peak output almost topped 24 GW – both new records by a wide margin.

This capped off a record-breaking year more broadly, with 2025 seeing wind, solar, and biomass each deliver their highest annual output on record. Growing low-carbon generation helped Britain's electricity become cleaner than ever, with average carbon intensity falling to 121 g/kWh, a fraction of a gram below the previous record set in 2024.

The tables below look over the past seventeen years (since 2009) and report the record output and share of electricity generation, plus sustained averages over a day, a month, and a calendar year. Cells highlighted in blue are records that were broken in the fourth quarter of 2025, or during 2025 as a whole. Each number links to the date it occurred on the Electric Insights website, so these records can be explored visually.

	Wind – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	23,938	74.9%
Day average	21,687	65.1%
Month average	14,525	40.4%
Year average	9,794	29.9%

	Solar – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	14,035	43.2%
Day average	4,909	17.0%
Month average	3,415	11.5%
Year average	2,502	6.3%

	Biomass – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	3,831	17.0%
Day average	3,547	12.9%
Month average	2,926	9.1%
Year average	2,449	7.5%

	All Renewables – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	31,698	83.4%
Day average	25,373	74.3%
Month average	18,334	51.7%
Year average	14,680	44.8%

	Gross demand	
	Maximum (MW)	Minimum (MW)
Instantaneous	60,070	16,934
Day average	49,203	23,297
Month average	45,003	26,081
Year average	37,736	29,910

	Demand (net of wind and solar)	
	Maximum (MW)	Minimum (MW)
Instantaneous	59,563	1,365
Day average	48,823	6,292
Month average	43,767	15,229
Year average	36,579	18,902



**Day ahead wholesale price**

Maximum (£/MWh) Minimum (£/MWh)

Instantaneous	1,983.66	-99.01
Day average	666.90	-11.35
Month average	353.36	22.03
Year average	198.16	33.88



**All low carbon – Maximum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	39,126	97.0%
Day average	31,329	90.1%
Month average	24,126	75.5%
Year average	21,082	64.3%



**All fossil fuels – Maximum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	49,307	88.0%
Day average	43,085	86.4%
Month average	36,466	81.2%
Year average	29,709	76.3%



**Nuclear – Maximum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	9,342	42.8%
Day average	9,320	32.0%
Month average	8,649	26.5%
Year average	7,604	22.0%



**Coal – Maximum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	26,044	61.4%
Day average	24,589	52.0%
Month average	20,746	48.0%
Year average	15,628	42.0%



**Carbon intensity**

Maximum (g/kWh) Minimum (g/kWh)

Instantaneous	704	6
Day average	633	28
Month average	591	78
Year average	508	121



**All low carbon – Minimum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	3,395	8.3%
Day average	5,007	10.8%
Month average	6,885	16.7%
Year average	8,412	21.6%



**All fossil fuels – Minimum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	887	2.4%
Day average	1,990	6.2%
Month average	4,831	16.8%
Year average	8,474	26.6%



**Nuclear – Minimum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	1,955	5.0%
Day average	2,238	5.9%
Month average	2,964	8.9%
Year average	3,898	11.9%



**Coal – Minimum**

Output (MW) Share (%)

Instantaneous	0	0.0%
Day average	0	0.0%
Month average	0	0.0%
Year average	0	0.0%

	Gas – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	27,339	73.4%
Day average	24,906	64.5%
Month average	20,828	54.8%
Year average	17,930	46.0%

	Gas – Minimum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	738	1.8%
Day average	1,874	5.9%
Month average	4,748	16.5%
Year average	8,276	24.6%

	Imports – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	8,055	38.4%
Day average	7,299	30.0%
Month average	5,557	20.8%
Year average	4,995	15.7%

	Exports – Maximum	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	-5,662	-27.0%
Day average	-4,763	-14.1%
Month average	-3,098	-9.8%
Year average	-731	-5.8%

	Pumped storage – Maximum <sup>3</sup>	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	2,660	7.9%
Day average	409	1.3%

	Pumped storage – Minimum <sup>3</sup>	
	Output (MW)	Share (%)
Instantaneous	-2,782	-12.2%
Day average	-622	-4.5%

<sup>3</sup> Note that Britain has no inter-seasonal electricity storage, so we only report on half-hourly and daily records. Elexon and National Grid only report the output of large pumped hydro storage plants. The operation of battery, flywheel and other storage sites is not publicly available.



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