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Navigating Brexit and Beyond: Optimizing UK Export Strategies for Effective Shipping Solutions

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

This study examines the impact of Brexit's Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) on UK exporters to the EU and advocates for Delivered Duty Paid (DDP) Incoterms as a strategic solution. Post-Brexit customs procedures and administrative burdens have disrupted supply chains, particularly under Delivered at Place (DAP) terms, where EU buyers handle clearance. Secondary data analysis reveals significant challenges: 14% of UK exporters (approximately 16,400 firms) ceased EU operations after TCA implementation, with small businesses (≤6 staff) experiencing 30% export declines. Overall, UK-EU goods exports remain below pre-2019 levels. The research identifies DDP as a critical alternative that shifts customs responsibility to UK sellers. Case studies demonstrate DDP's advantages, including enhanced customer experience through elimination of hidden fees and paperwork, operational efficiency via faster clearance (especially crucial for perishables), and a competitive edge as buyers prioritize suppliers offering seamless logistics. Top logistics providers such as DHL, Kuehne + Nagel, and DPD Group facilitate DDP implementation with Brexit-adapted services, enabling regulatory compliance and reduced delays. The study concludes that adopting DDP supported by specialized logistics partners is essential for UK exporters to navigate post-Brexit complexities, ensure customer satisfaction, and rebuild trade resilience in the EU market.

Keywords: Brexit Trade Disruption, DDP Incoterms, UK-EU Export Strategy, Logistics Partnerships, Customer Retention.

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INTRODUCTION

International business has undergone major changes, especially in the second half of the last century, due to increased global interconnectedness and policy reforms such as market liberalisation and tariff reductions (Buckley, 2002). The pace of globalisation accelerated towards the millennium, driven by technological innovation and economic integration (Dabic, Maley, & Novak, 2019). However, events like the 2008 global financial crisis, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic have challenged the stability of global trade. These shifts have led to the re-emergence of national policies, protectionism, and new trade restrictions (Ghauri, Strange, & Cooke, 2021; Marinova, 2020). For example, the UK's exit from the EU has altered trading relations, introducing new customs procedures and non-tariff barriers that impact business operations (Tetlow & Pope, 2020; Jack & Rutter, 2021).

Effective shipping of goods across borders is essential for sustaining international trade. Delivery speed, service efficiency, and customer satisfaction depend on well-structured shipping operations. As a UK-based company serving customers beyond your home markets, finding seamless, cost-effective, and compliant shipping solutions becomes a part of your priority. In order to retain customers overseas, UK exporters must find a to navigate past the post-Brexit regulations in a way that meets the customs requirements and ensure customer satisfaction. So far, some UK exporters have been operating under the Delivered at Place (DAP) Incoterms, which at first seemed like a reasonable and cost-effective way to ship goods overseas. DAP is one of several Incoterms that require buyers to handle customs formalities and costs, such as import duties, import taxes, and, in some cases, waiting costs (Davis & Vogt, 2021).

However, this arrangement is beginning to wear down their customers. With the added complexities of post-Brexit regulations, shipping operations became more tedious and demanding, requiring export companies to rethink their logistics strategies to stay competitive. According to Jonathan Kemp, Managing Director of AEV Group Limited, UK sellers are pressured by EU customers to reduce costs or relocate production due to increased expenses and paperwork, forcing many to lower their prices or shift operations to the EU (BCC, 2021). This research, therefore, explores key trade regulations, shipping models, and logistics solutions to help UK-based companies with EU customers optimise their operations, enhancing efficiency and customer retention.

Customer satisfaction is a top priority for every business; however, most UK exporters to the EU struggle to meet this due to the Delivered at Place (DAP) Incoterms under which they operate. This is because the introduction of Brexit's trade rules, known as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) has made shipping between the UK and the EU far more complicated, adding more paperwork, extra costs, delays at customs, and even the hassle of needing an EU representative to get things cleared (PwC, 2021). According to Jonathan Kemp, Managing Director of AEV Group Limited, UK sellers are pressured by EU customers to reduce costs or relocate production due to increased expenses and paperwork, forcing many to lower their prices or shift operations to the EU (BCC, 2021). Also, 14% of UK firms (around 16,400) that previously exported to the EU stopped doing so after the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in January 2021, as increased trade barriers made exporting less viable, particularly for smaller businesses (CEP, 2024) As a result, exporters have been forced to make tough decisions to retain customers, often through discounts on goods, which impacts their profit margins (Le Mark Group, 2023). To address these challenges and help UK exporters retain customers cost-effectively, this research evaluates alternative shipping options, focusing on Delivered Duty Paid (DDP) as an alternative to DAP.

The United Kingdom's (UK) decision to leave the European Union (EU), known as Brexit, introduced significant uncertainty into the business world. From the time of the referendum in 2016 until the formal withdrawal in January 2021, many sectors were affected, with services being among the most impacted. These sectors rely heavily on clear regulations, easy movement across borders, and harmonised standards to succeed in international markets (Mulabdic *et al.,* 2017). Several factors contributed to this period of confusion. First, there was uncertainty about when or how the UK would leave the EU. Even after Article 50 was triggered in 2017, political debates, leadership changes, and multiple deadline extensions made the situation more unpredictable. Businesses, particularly those trading with the EU, were uncertain whether the UK would exit with a trade deal or fall back to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, which could have introduced tariffs and other barriers (Bank of England, 2019). Second, the exact terms of the future trade relationship between the UK and EU remained unsettled for most of the transition period. Issues like customs arrangements, regulatory alignment, and border checks were all left unclear. This uncertainty made it difficult for companies, especially service providers, to plan or make investments (Mulabdic *et al.,* 2017).

Third, the political environment within the UK was unstable. Leadership changes, internal party conflicts, and parliamentary struggles weakened business confidence, as nobody could predict how Brexit policies would eventually turn out. According to the Bank of England (2019), many companies adopted a "wait-and-see" approach, delaying expansions and investments due to political uncertainty. Finally, the global trade environment worsened around this period. Trade tensions between major economies, such as the United States and China, made global markets more unpredictable. As a result, UK firms were not only worried about losing easy access to the EU market but also concerned about finding new partners in such a volatile international environment (Mulabdic *et al.,* 2017). Economic indicators reflected this tension. For instance, the UK's Economic Policy Uncertainty (EPU) Index increased sharply after the referendum and remained high throughout the negotiation period, showing widespread concerns over economic instability (Bank of England, 2019).

The Uppsala model is one of the traditional theories of internationalisation, which suggests that firms internationalise their operations gradually. Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) categorised the internationalisation process into four stages based on four Swedish firms. The stages include: domestic market operation, similar market exporting, foreign sales subsidiary, and overseas manufacturing setup. The Uppsala model was revised in 2009 to account for changes in the business environment and the behaviour of firms. In the updated model, the business environment is no longer viewed as a market of separate firms and customers but as a network of relationships. Knowledge creation, particularly opportunities for knowledge, is now viewed as the key driver of internationalisation, replacing the focus on market knowledge from the original model. In this revised model (Figure 1), the emphasis shifts to relationships within networks, with commitment decisions now influenced by relationships and activities such as learning, creating, and trust-building (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009).

Thus, the current study aims to investigate the aftermath of Brexit: UK-EU customs regulations, known as the TCA, on UK-EU Exporters, evaluate the benefits of Delivered Duty Paid (DDP) as an alternative to Delivered at Place (DAP) for a sustainable UK-EU trade, and identify the most preferred logistics companies providing DDP services for seamless international trade that complies with Brexit customs.

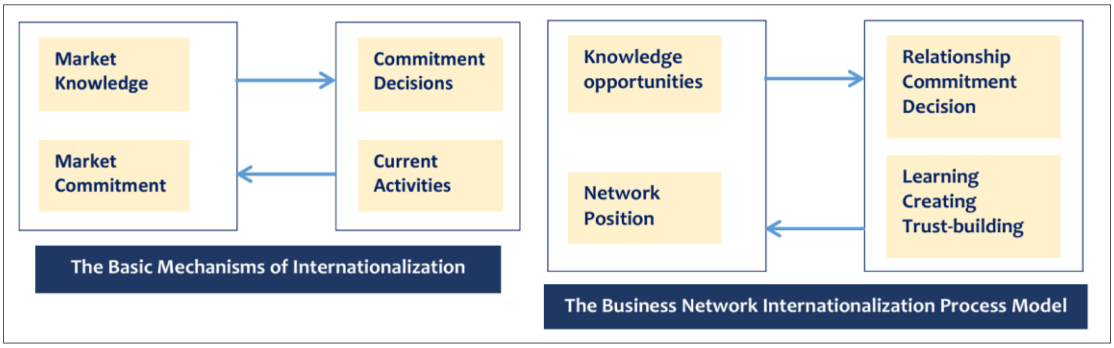

Figure 1: Revised Uppsala Model

METHOD

This research made use of a qualitative approach, which means it focused more on understanding ideas, patterns, and experiences rather than using numbers or statistics. The study was mainly based on secondary data, meaning that the information used had already been collected by others. This included data from industry reports, published case studies, company performance records, and expert opinions found in trusted sources. By analyzing these materials, the research was able to gather useful insights and identify key themes related to international shipping and post-Brexit trade conditions. This method was chosen because it allowed for a deeper understanding of the topic from different perspectives without the need to collect new data from scratch.

Data sources include Government Reports: Secondary data from government agencies such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) provided valuable information about the UK-EU trade volume. They revealed data on trades that cover the period before, during, and after the Brexit trade regulations began. Expert Insights: Opinions from economists and trade experts who have evaluated the effect of the post-Brexit customs regulations on UK exporters were sourced to provide deeper insights to support the analysis of this research. Case Studies and Business Reports: Several business reports and case studies were reviewed, highlighting the difficulties imposed on UK exporters by the post-Brexit trade regulations as well as the shift from DAP to DDP Incoterms. An example of the case studies is feedback from companies such as Europa Worldwide Group and Chemico, which highlighted the challenges UK exporters currently face and the benefits of switching to DDP. Company and Institutional Data: Institutions such as the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT UK) served as a good source for data to help UK exporters identify the top-performing logistics company offering DDP shipping services for UK exporters in response to the post-Brexit customs regulations.

RESULTS

After checking different reliable sources, some key information was gathered to help support this research. The findings are explained based on the main goals of the study, which are to help UK exporters understand the changes and challenges that come with post-Brexit customs rules. It also looks at the advantages of using Delivered Duty Paid (DDP) shipping and points out some of the top logistics companies that offer DDP services to EU customers.

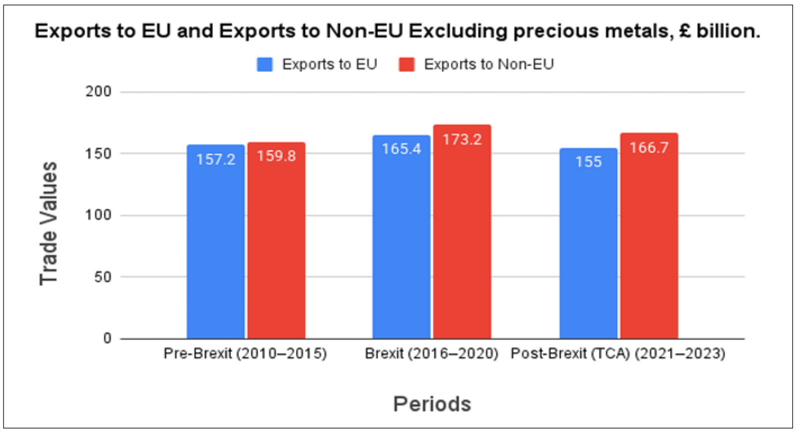

Figure 2: Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that UK export levels are yet to catch up with the pre-2019 trade levels (Webb & Ward, 2024)

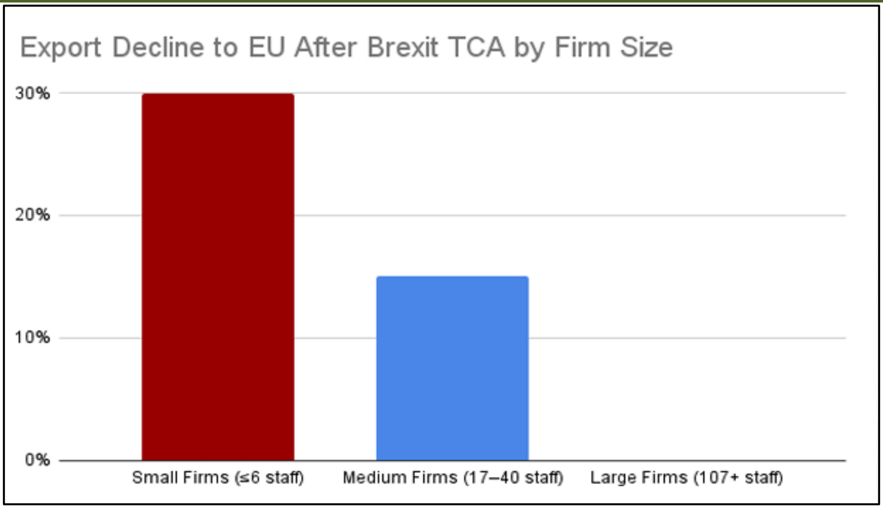

Figure 3: Export decline to EU after Brexit TCA firm size

DISCUSSION

The Aftermath of Brexit - UK-EU Customs Regulations On UK-EU Exporters

For decades, the trade between the United Kingdom and the European Union has been an easy flow, with no tariffs, customs declarations, and subtle friction at the border. Businesses in both regions enjoyed the ease with which they moved goods without extra costs or delays, but all that changed with the introduction of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). At first, it seemed like a nice plan, having no costs on goods that meet the rules of origin (RoO) requirement. However, a new challenge arose in the absence of direct tariffs, which included regulators' checks, the cluster of customs declarations, and compliance costs. Business between the UK and the EU never remained the same afterwards.

Challenges for UK-EU Businesses

The new trading operations came with many difficulties, especially for the UK exporters operating under the Delivered at Place (DAP) Incoterms. Under the DAP, buyers bear the burden of customs clearance and duties. The key challenges include: Increased costs: Over 60% of EU-UK businesses reported increased expenses in carrying out their shipping operations as a result of logistical and compliance hassles; Administrative Hurdles: Businesses have to go through complex customs declarations, proof of origin requirements, and border checks; Disruptions in Supply Chain: Delays in the supply chain arose as a result of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspections and increased compliance costs; Although businesses are already adapting to the new normal, some still suffer from customer dissatisfaction, which has led to trade disruptions and even shutdowns. Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that UK export levels are yet to catch up with the pre-2019 trade levels.

Impact on Businesses' Performance and Experts Insights on the TCA's Impact

The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) conducted a study that analysed over 100,000 UK businesses, revealing the TCA's impact on many exporters. About 14% of the firms, approximately 16,400 small businesses, ceased exporting to the EU. Smaller firms (6 or fewer staff) had a 30% decline. Medium-sized firms (17 - 40 staff) had a 15% decline. Large firms (over 107 employees) remained stable. Also, the study revealed that the TCA led to a 3.1% decline in EU imports into the UK in 2022, while trade imports from non-EU companies increased.

The TCA has complicated supply networks and increased uncertainty for exporters. Firms' performance in the medium to long run will hinge on their ability to maintain supply networks and diversify export demand - Kalina Manova, Professor of Economics at UCL (2024). The TCA has been a disaster for small exporters, many of which have simply stopped exporting to the EU. At the same time, larger firms have adapted well to the new trade barriers. Consequently, total exports have, at least so far, declined less than expected - Thomas Sampson, Associate Professor of Economics at LSE (2024). There has been a significant drop in SMEs trading with the EU. These businesses find the new requirements too complex; they've reacted to the many stories of problems with customs processes, and they don't have the expertise or staff to cope with the extra rules and regulations now in place - Marco Forgione, Director General, Chartered Institute of Export & International Trade (2024). The TCA has caused severe disruptions in the UK-EU supply chain, particularly in consumer and intermediate goods. The negative impacts of the TCA have intensified over time, with 2023 showing more pronounced trade declines than previous years - Aston University Report (2024). After the referendum, there was essentially no change in firms' trade with the EU until the TCA came into effect. It was the introduction of new trade barriers under the TCA, rather than the uncertainty of the withdrawal process, that reduced firms' trade with the EU - Thomas Prayer. Associate, CEP Trade Programme (2024).

Adapting to the new trade environment: the shift from DAP to DDP

To adapt to these trade frictions, businesses must seek new ways to optimize their shipping operations to streamline crossborder trading operations and improve customer experience. An alternative solution is to switch from Delivered at Place (DAP) to Delivered Duty Paid (DDP). Under the DAP, the buyers bear the burden of clearance and import duties, which increases complexity and dissatisfaction. As one export manager from Chemico stated: A lot of these customers are not used to doing that. They're not used to having import agents clear the goods, and they struggle with the process. We are seeing difficulties for local purchasing companies in following through on the proces - Vladan Nikolic, Export manager, ChemiCo (2024). Switching to DDP relieves the buyers of the customs burdens and border hurdles, allowing them to receive goods without additional protocols. Although this may increase the expenses for exporters, it can significantly improve customer experience and retention, thereby fostering long-term trade relationships. According to Richard (2021), UK suppliers are fast-moving to DDP because they fear losing EU customers to EU-resident suppliers who do not face the new customs declarations, potential tariffs, and import VAT charges.

Advantages of DDP in the post-Brexit trade environment

Since the UK left the EU, trading between the two regions has become more stressful, especially for EU buyers. Many of them now face issues like extra customs charges, delay in receiving goods, and too much paperwork especially when using DAP (Delivered at Place) terms. This situation is even worse with the new rules from the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). But using DDP (Delivered Duty Paid) has made things easier. With DDP, the seller handles most of the process, including customs and delivery costs, making the whole transaction smooth for the buyer. This way, EU customers don’t face hidden charges or stress over clearing their goods. In this part, we will talk about the major benefits of DDP for UK exporters, such as faster delivery, no surprise charges, and a better experience for customers, which can help UK businesses stay strong in the EU market.

Improved Customer Experience

EU buyers under DAP already face enough challenges in clearing their goods with uncertain expenses such as customs fees, taxes, and duties, let alone the introduction of TCA, which has worsened the situation. With DDP, the sellers are responsible for the expenses, thereby allowing the buyers to experience a seamless trading operation, which enables them to know precisely the checkout expense. This allows them to plan their budget effectively.

According to Andrew Baxter, CEO of Europa Worldwide Group (2024), with Ireland being Britain’s fourth largest export market, the increased complexity associated with the customs border is preventing the seamless transportation of goods for British businesses. This is impacting transit times, increasing the amount of customs paperwork required, and could have costly and time-critical implications. By eliminating complicated administrative burdens from buyers under DDP, UK exporters can ensure a seamless customer experience that keeps their customers satisfied and fosters continuous business transactions.

Reduced Delays and Swift Custom Clearance

With UK exporters handling the customs procedures, the clearance process is now faster and easier for the EU buyers to manage. Clearance time is a critical factor to consider for businesses that aim to maintain competitive shipping time, especially for perishable goods or electronics, which are really time sensitive. A Scotland-based manufacturer that recently adopted Europa Flow's DDP service reported: The new DDP service from Europa has been well received by our current Irish customers, in that the admin burden imposed on them has significantly decreased. It has also reopened some customer conversations that have been closed since Brexit occurred. Thus, by operating under DDP, sellers can eliminate long delays and uncertainty for buyers, thereby ensuring faster delivery times and a predictable shipping procedure. This approach significantly gives UK exporters a major advantage in the EU market.

Predictable Cost and no Hidden Charges

One major drawback of operating under DAP is the risk of hidden charges for both sellers and buyers. The post-Brexit regulations put the buyers at risk of unexpected expenses, which can probably lead to disputes when they receive their goods with surprise extra charges. Europa Road has addressed this issue with its DDP-based Europa Flow service, which eliminates these unpredictable expenses. Europa Flow has successfully delivered over 300,000 DDP consignments to mainland Europe, offering a unique combination of DDP, postponed VAT accounting, and anticipated declarations. In turn, the service can offer faster transit times, lower costs, and no administrative headaches for British businesses. This approach maintains a solid, transparent relationship, especially with new customers, and reduces the chances of failed transactions or losing sales due to unexpected expenses.

Solid Competitive Edge in the EU Market and Increased Trades with Seamless Service

UK businesses operating with DDP terms have a solid competitive edge when delivering beyond borders. The post-Brexit environment has forced EU buyers to seek sellers who provide transparent shipping services without customs and logistics complications. Adrian Redmile, Branch and Sales Director at Europa Worldwide Group, emphasised the importance of this strategy: Despite the challenges that were presented as trade regulations changed post-Brexit, there is a cost-effective and efficient solution to ensuring seamless movement of goods. By operating under DDP, sellers can have a customer-centric position, offering a reliable shipping experience for their customers, which strengthens the relationship with international clients and leads to higher repeat transactions.

One crucial factor to consider when operating a business is to encourage customers to return. According to PayPal (2024), repeat customers can be the lifeblood of any business, turning one-time purchases into a reliable revenue stream. A global online shopper survey reveals that when the buyer knows that the seller is fully responsible for the delivery of their order, they may be more inclined to complete a transaction and feel more confident in their decision (DHL, 2023). Europa Flow's Money Back Guarantee further reinforces this confidence: We are also the only provider with sites in Britain and Ireland offering a Money Back Guarantee on all Europa Flow shipments. This unique offer will ensure full refunds for consignments not delivered on time. Thus, businesses with DDP have a greater chance of having more repeat customers, a competitive edge, and a firm position in the European market.

Leveraging logistics partners to implement DDP shipping solutions

For UK exporters to incorporate the DDP system and provide seamless trade operations for their customers in the EU, it's imperative to identify the companies that offer shipping services under the DDP terms. The wake of TCA has made several leading logistics companies integrate DDP services to ensure that UK exporters can maintain their presence in the EU market space. These logistics companies make it easier for sellers and buyers to complete the customs clearance procedure quickly,

in compliance with the TCA customs regulations. They ensure that sellers and buyers understand their roles and act accordingly to ensure a smooth international trade between the UK exporters and EU buyers. However, for this brochure, we will be highlighting a few key logistics providers that offer comprehensive DDP services for UK-EU trade.

Top DDP Logistics Companies for UK-EU Trade

Based on data from the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT UK), on the performance, compliance, innovation, and financials of logistics companies, DHL, Ligentia UK, Kuehne + Nagel, DPD Group, and Edge Worldwide Logistics were ranked Top 5 out of the Top 30 Logistics Service Providers 2024. Top of the list is DHL Supply Chain Limited with DDP Services Offered: End-to-end logistics, customs clearance, supply chain optimisation Service Strengths: Global infrastructure, real-time tracking, and industry-leading compliance tools. EU Route Coverage: Extensive network across the EU and globally connected via land, sea, and air. Regulatory Adaptability – Strong post-Brexit compliance and automated customs handling. Others include Kuehne + Nagel Limited; DDP Services Offered: Freight forwarding, DDP customs brokerage, multimodal shipping. Service Strengths: Tech-driven operations, vast warehousing, and personalised support. EU Route Coverage: Highly connected to all major EU logistics hubs. Regulatory Adaptability – Robust Brexit-adjusted procedures and trade compliance expertise. GXO Logistics UK Limited; DDP Services Offered: Contract logistics, DDP e-commerce fulfilment, returns, and inventory management. Service Strengths: Scalable warehouse automation and real-time operational insights. EU Route Coverage: Efficient UK–EU distribution channels and reverse logistics. Regulatory Adaptability – Flexible and adaptive to regulatory changes and trade agreements. Lastly, DPD Group UK Ltd; DDP Services Offered: Parcel delivery with duties and taxes paid, customs clearance services. Service Strengths: Fast, reliable, and trackable B2C parcel delivery across Europe. EU Route Coverage: Comprehensive EU road delivery network. Regulatory Adaptability - ½ – Solid customs support, recently upgraded for Brexit challenges.

CONCLUSION

The post-Brexit trade landscape has introduced several hurdles for UK exporters, such as VAT compliance, delivery delays, and complex customs clearance. Therefore, businesses must optimise their shipping strategy to maintain a competitive edge and foster a better customer experience. Out of several incoterms, this project has highlighted the Delivery Duty Paid (DDP) strategy as one of the most effective shipping solutions. By incorporating DDP, UK exporters can offer quick, efficient, and customer-centric shipping solutions to customers in the EU. This makes DDP not just an option but a strategic approach to foster trust, improve service, and stay ahead in the post-Brexit trade landscape. Furthermore, this project highlighted the top-performing logistics companies such as DHL, Lingentia, and DPD Group, which offer DDP service to promote seamless shipping for UK exporters, in compliance with the post-Brexit customs regulations. Therefore, incorporating DDP with top-performing logistics partners can give UK exporters the edge to meet customs compliance and ensure customer satisfaction.

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