



NatWest
Group

| Open Innovation

Emerging Tech Trends 2026

The shift to always-on



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Foreword

The technological revolution, led by rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI), has been and continues to be well-signposted as it increasingly dominates the business agenda and provides ever greater convenience to consumers.

What is less discussed is the associated social revolution that we think will be as impactful as any that have ever occurred in the past. From an always-on economy dominated by AI agents to health advances boosting life expectancy, the way in which we all live and work is set to radically change.

The NatWest Emerging Tech Trends 2026 report delivers clear perspectives on the key tech trends, highlighting how we think these will drive change.

“

Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower

Steve Jobs, inventor, designer and entrepreneur

”

Section 1

Our methodology



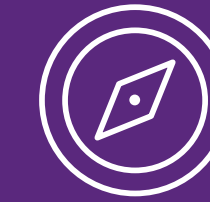
Our emerging tech trends report is sub-divided into two main parts



The Innovation Radar

The Innovation Radar is a visualisation of the most important emerging tech and associated developments, focusing on where there is real potential to make a difference.

We've identified nearly 90 of these tech 'signals' across a range of areas, from AI to healthcare.



The tech trends

The tech trends are thematic, representing how we see the tech signals converging or creating new or developing applications.

We present eight tech trends for 2026 that best reflect our views of the emerging tech landscape:

1. The rise of the agentic economy
2. An AI workforce for everyone
3. We, robot
4. An ambience of smart devices
5. Quantum of opportunity
6. More than a token change
7. Empowering the tech future
8. A life well (and long) lived

Our tech trends are derived from assessing the correlation across and convergence of tech signals

The starting point for this report is the identification of potential tech signals for inclusion in the Innovation Radar.

This work is underpinned by extensive research, examining a wide range of possible emerging tech and the broader landscape around these techs, including, but not limited to, applicable policy developments, commercial and market developments, and cultural shifts.

The cornerstone of our research is leveraging the knowledge and expertise within NatWest Group's Open Innovation team, which researches, explores and develops applications across a range of emerging tech for the benefit of our customers. We do this collaboratively with a range of experts and innovative companies in the tech sector.

We supplement the team's research through working closely with bank colleagues to understand the market and customer views and trends, bringing the business perspective into our analysis.

Our identification of emerging technologies and associated trends is benchmarked against a range of comprehensive third-party technology trend reports to provide assurance that our research is reasonable and complete.

We use a scorecard to assess the merits of potential emerging tech and associated areas of development. The scorecard uses five attributes:

1. Novelty:

A measure of the expected level of change delivered by the area of development relative to what exists currently.

2. Impact:

A measure of the extent to which the area of development is expected to yield real-world utility or consequences.

3. Depth:

A measure of the size of the body of research, experimentation and build-out associated with the area of development.

4. Momentum:

A measure of the speed and direction towards progressing the area of development.

5. Timeliness:

The time horizon over which the area of development is expected to be realised or adopted at scale.

The results of our scorecard are used to create the Innovation Radar, a visual map of the emerging tech we consider to have the potential to make the most difference in the future.

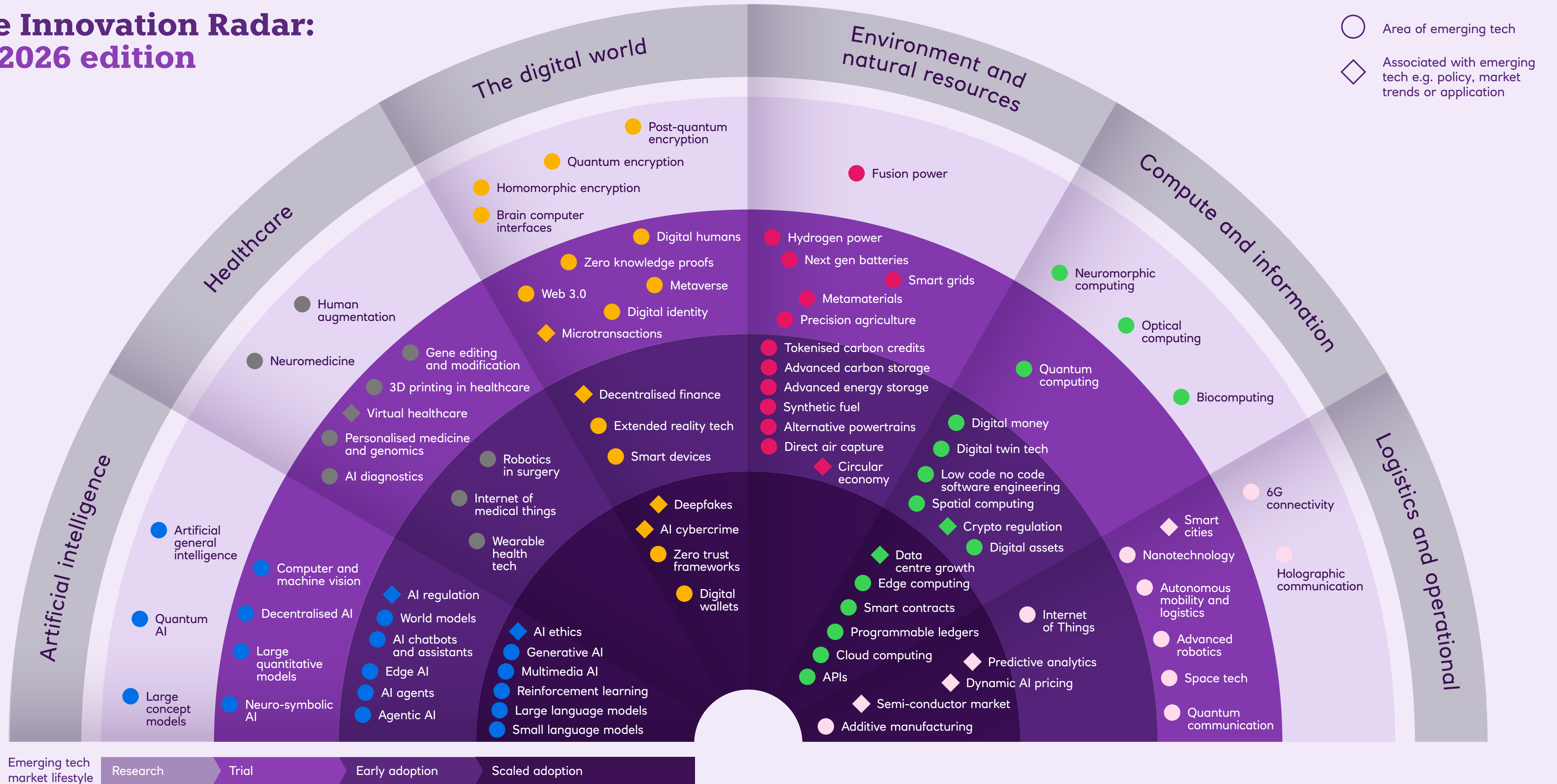
We use the Innovation Radar and our understanding of the emerging tech landscape to discern patterns and inter-connections across the tech signals and the range of potential future outcomes.

Section 2

The Innovation Radar



The Innovation Radar: H1 2026 edition



We describe tech signals across six categories

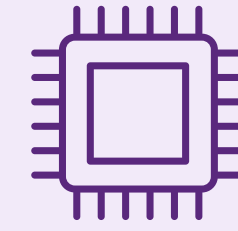


Artificial Intelligence

Covers developments in AI, both direct and indirect.

Near-term developments are focused on reliability, flexibility and efficiency with policymakers concerned with balancing economic potential with safety.

Further out, there is work to create more intelligent and autonomous models.



Compute and information

Covers developments in computing and information technologies, outside of AI.

A common theme across developments is a focus on scale, capacity and efficiency as demands on compute and information continue to accelerate, including demands from AI.



The digital world

Covers developments in the infrastructure, application and safety across the digital and online landscape.

As the devices we use to access the digital world proliferate and leverage AI, more immersive experiences are being created.

As cybercrime continues to represent a material threat, focus on safety-related tech remains a priority.



Healthcare

Covers developments associated with the health of individuals and society.

Focus is on advances that create personalised diagnosis and treatment at the genetic level, and the use of AI to support across the healthcare cycle.

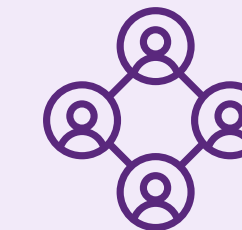
Signals suggest a future of active and continuous monitoring of health through smart wearables and nano-devices.



Environment and natural resources

Covers developments associated with the environment, resources (on and beyond Earth) and development of artificial materials.

Much of the focus is on less impactful and more efficient energy sources, which becomes increasingly critical as demand for power continues to increase.



Logistics and operational

Covers developments in commercial and industrial settings, as well as the infrastructure that underpins modern society.

Much of the focus is on more intelligent, more efficient and more capable processes and networks, leveraging broader tech developments, such as AI. Automated approaches continue to be a top priority.

Section 3

Our 2026 tech trends



We highlight 8 current tech trends we believe are most likely to be impactful to society (1/2)



Tech trend 1

The rise of the agentic economy

We are on the cusp of an unparalleled economic revolution with genuinely society-changing implications.

As AI capability continues to improve, the drive to optimise efficiency and enhance capability within businesses will propel adoption of AI across commercial markets.

As businesses shift to an always-on proposition, we will see productivity reach unprecedented levels with activity dominated by AI-to-AI interactions and a significant shift in job roles.



Tech trend 2

An AI workforce for everyone

The internet and smartphone era changed the way that we live and work. The rise of AI assistants is set to have an even greater impact.

Everyone will have their own personal AI assistant that will act as expert advisor, confidant, concierge and aide, and will be ever present no matter where you are. It will fundamentally change the way people live, with the use of and reliance on AI assistants underpinning everything we do.



Tech trend 3

We, robot

No longer the realm of science fiction, robots will become embedded into everyday life. The physical embodiment of AI, robots of a diverse range of forms and sizes will be embedded across society. From industrial robots to self-driving vehicles, from medical specialists to domestic support.

Despite some resistance to humanoid robots – as primal fears take hold – we see robots becoming an indispensable infrastructure of the future.



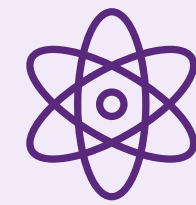
Tech trend 4

An ambience of smart devices

Smartphones will give way to a myriad of different smart devices for both personal and business use that will act as key conduits for engaging with AI, providing a rich and immersive experience for users, where contextual insights are delivered where and when they are needed.

Individual devices will evolve into an always-on ambient layer that is integrated into the environment around us and that will proactively support people and businesses but challenging our concepts of privacy.

We highlight 8 current tech trends we believe are most likely to be impactful to society (2/2)

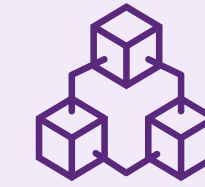


Tech trend 5

Quantum of opportunity

Quantum computing will be able to solve problems that not even the most powerful supercomputer can tackle today. But this isn't just a computing story.

It's about tackling some of society's most intractable challenges. Whether it's optimising the use of agricultural land, boosting the capability to discover new and effective medical drugs, identifying the most efficient logistical solutions for deliveries and transport or far better weather forecasting, quantum computing will have broad and far-reaching benefits.



Tech trend 6

More than a token change

It is said that money makes the world go round. We're set for a major upgrade of this, using the tech that underpins the likes of Bitcoin, reshaping how money works, enabling near-instantaneous, automated and flexible payments anywhere in the world. But it's not just a money upgrade.

Financial markets will be the first to shift to a genuinely always-on, real-time ecosystem using blockchain and digital assets. but we expect this tech to be leveraged across commercial markets and beyond to create more efficient, transparent and safer services.



Tech trend 7

Empowering the tech future

Realisation of the tech future is dependent on the ready availability of the requisite building blocks, notably the need for energy to power this future, the materials to build it and the human talent to work with it and this will drive significant innovation.

Beyond compute energy efficiency, we expect significant investment to realise nuclear fusion before the end of the 2030s, a development that will have huge geopolitical ramifications. And geopolitics will drive the development of new smart and biomaterials to build the hardware.



Tech trend 8

A life well (and long) lived

Emerging tech, such as AI and gene editing, is transforming healthcare, enabling unprecedented capability to detect, diagnose, treat and prevent health issues. Not only will this lead to a healthier population, but life expectancy will also significantly step up, with those born in the next couple of decades living beyond 120 years.

But this isn't just a health story, population and demographic changes will have significant geopolitical and societal implications.

Technology trends, led by developments in AI, suggest a shift towards a real-time, always-on operating rhythm

AI is set to underpin our future world. There's a lot of hype right now and it's fair to say that AI isn't quite at the level it needs to be to live up to that hype.

Given the amount of investment and pace of progression, we think it won't be too long before we get there. Two trends in AI stand out as critical:

1. *Autonomy*: the drive to create a true agentic AI that has effective planning, decision-making and execution capability without supervision.
2. *Logic*: the application of common-sense to AI models, combining natural language and logic approaches – for example, neuro-symbolic AI.

These developments will bring the trust needed to deploy AI.

And the reason why AI is hyped and will ultimately become such a game-changer? The ability to embed intelligent automation in almost every aspect of our society and an ability for AI to be 'on' at all times. New York will no longer be the only city that never sleeps.

Of the tech trends that we highlight, AI drives or influences seven of them. The other one, quantum of opportunity, is expected to provide a boost to AI capability.

And if AI realises even a fraction of the predictions, we expect there to be significant societal changes, as people and organisations use and rely upon AI to do just about everything.

For people, AI will bring the time-saving and convenience that is so desired, delivered through a network of ambient smart devices. Over time, AI will be capable of acting as autonomous personal assistants and users will rely on AI to run their lives, organising activities and undertaking tasks such as shopping and managing finances. And this can all happen in the background, 24/7.

For businesses, a shift to agentic AI capability will fundamentally reshape the economy. Active at all times, AI agents will operate businesses continuously without break and act as a conduit with customers and suppliers. And autonomous robots will be operating supply chains and logistical operations around the clock.

The always-on operating rhythm will extend to the medical sector, where proactive health tracking and AI-powered diagnostics will revolutionise healthcare.

The future is one in which ever-present, ever-on AI-powered support creates a brand-new type of society where 'it just happens'.

Tech trend 1

The rise of the agentic economy



Deployment of AI by enterprise will create an economy underpinned by autonomous AI that operates 24/7.

There are two primary drivers of this trend. The first is the expected evolution of AI, shifting from generative AI – focused on content creation – to agentic AI which will provide autonomy and deliver decision-making and execution capabilities.

At the same time, enterprise is and will continue to accelerate deployment of AI agent workflows, providing intelligent automation of enterprise activities, initially focused on routine processes.

This shift to an agentic AI foundation will redefine enterprise and reshape the economy.

For organisations, agentic AI will become a primary channel through which activities and engagement are undertaken but oversight will be critical.

As the economy shifts to an always-on approach, domestic and global productivity will increase. But a shift in the (human) workforce will create personal, economic and political challenges.

Select tech signals

- Agentic AI
- AI agents
- Neuro-symbolic AI
- Edge AI
- AI ethics

Select 2025 market signals

- Amazon pilots Project Eluna, an agentic AI system to support its warehouse operations.
- Open AI announces an AI agent development tool, AgentKit, and unveils the agentic commerce protocol it developed with Stripe.
- Google unveils AP2, an open protocol to be the foundation for AI agents to transact payments on behalf of users and merchants.
- AWS unveils its Bedrock AgentCore platform that looks to simplify the build and deployment of AI agents for enterprise.
- Manus AI is released in China, marketed as the world's first general-purpose AI assistant.

Tech trend 1

The rise of the agentic economy



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - The use of AI agent workflows transitions to mainstream.
- 2027** - Reliable and genuine agentic AI models emerge.
- 2027** - More comprehensive AI regulation is developed, addressing ethics, safety, and operations, while clarifying competition laws to ensure fair play among model owners and big tech.
- 2028** - Emergence of neuro-symbolic AI that brings greater reasoning and reliability to AI models.
- 2030** - Transition from AI agent to agentic AI workflows, bringing intelligent and autonomous workflows to organisations leading to a step up in productivity.
- 2032** - AI-only organisations emerge but face challenge from the public.

Our analysis: AI agents will pervade economic activity

As AI agents produce ever increasing efficiency, productivity and capability benefits, and more organisations adopt AI agent workflows, we expect a critical mass will be reached that will lead to AI agent workflows not only becoming normalised but becoming an essential tool of doing business.

We expect that the transition to the widescale use of AI agents will change the nature of economy, creating an always-on, more open approach. All organisations will need to adapt, and we will see the rise of both AI native and AI-only organisations.

There will inevitably be an impact to the human workforce, although it is unclear quite how this will pan out but, as a minimum, the nature of job roles is set to undergo a significant shift. Organisations will need to carefully balance the use of AI with human talent.

Tech trend 2

An AI workforce for everyone



The future is one where people use and rely upon AI for advice and to carry out everyday tasks on their behalf.

There are several factors that are driving the use of AI assistants:

- The development of more reliable and proactive AI models that can make decisions and execute actions.
- The deployment of more efficient AI that can operate locally on devices.
- The embedding of AI into devices and processes across all areas of life and work, making it always accessible.
- A preference for convenience and the use of tools that enable this.

Today AI is already being widely used

by individuals, for example for search, education and as a shopping aide. As the use of AI becomes normalised across an ever-wider range of activities, and AI becomes ever more deeply personal, reliance on AI will become embedded into everything we do.

Ultimately, we think AI will act as a workforce, providing advice whenever needed and undertaking many of the activities we do today on our behalf, for example managing our finances.

Strict regulation on data and privacy, and on providing necessary protections, will be reformed to adapt to developing AI.

Select tech signals

- Agentic AI
- AI chatbots and assistants
- Small language models
- Edge AI
- Smart devices
- Digital identity

Select 2025 market signals

- Adobe Analytics reports that AI traffic to US retail sites increased by 805% year-over-year on Black Friday.
- AI browsers take off, with OpenAI's Atlas, Microsoft's Copilot Mode in Edge, Perplexity's Comet challenging Google.
- OpenAI unveils ChatGPT Pulse that enables ChatGPT to deliver daily personalised updates based on users' preferences.
- OpenAI introduces ChatGPT Agent, which completes a wide variety of computer-based tasks on behalf of users.
- Amazon, OpenAI and Google are amongst the companies that have released AI agents to enhance the shopping experience.

Tech trend 2

An AI workforce for everyone



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - AI with basic agentic capabilities, that can interact with apps are released onto consumer smartphones.
- 2027** - Reliable and genuine agentic AI models emerge and trust in AI by users continues its upward trend.
- 2027** - Regulatory frameworks on AI reformed to further instil trust.
- 2028** - Dedicated personal AI assistants with human-level interaction capabilities begin to be launched, combining agentic capabilities with personalised UX.
- 2030** - Scaled adoption of personal AI assistants by users and development of a service ecosystem to work with personal AI agents.
- 2034** - Personal AI assistants gain human-level intelligence and are widely used to advise, coach, educate and carry out many everyday tasks, including at work.

Our analysis: AI as advisor, helper, confidant and friend

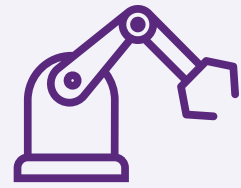
We view the growing use of AI assistants by users as a vector for widescale behavioural change, reshaping how society functions.

We expect that over time, AI assistants will be able to develop deep empathetic engagement with users, creating strong bonds with those users over time. Moreover, AI assistants will be a reliable source of expertise across all topics and be capable of executing tasks on behalf of users (directly or otherwise).

Thus, much of what people do will be through their personal AI assistant, be it consuming information, receiving services or managing their lives. Not only will this reshape how services are delivered to users, not just commercial but education and healthcare as well, but it will change the way that organisations need to operate to support this new way of living.

Tech trend 3

We, robot



The robot legion cometh! Robots are set to be deployed to support people and businesses everywhere.

Mechanical humanoids have long been the stuff of myth and science fiction. But advances in mechanical engineering, machine vision and AI herald the robotic age.

The use of robots in industrial settings, introduced in the 1950s, is to shift from assembly line automatons to intelligent, autonomous and mobile robots that can collaborate with other robots (and people).

Although still basic in functionality, humanoid robots have seen significant recent advances, both in form and in

intelligence, and we expect those advances to accelerate over the next few years.

As humanoid robots become more advanced, costs fall and manufacturing scales, robots will begin to be deployed across commercial and domestic settings although expect ethics and rights, as well as some level of public resistance, to follow.

Robots will become widely used in transportation and logistics, as vehicles of all types shift towards becoming fully autonomous.

Select tech signals

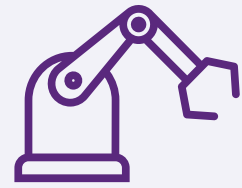
- Multimodal AI
- Edge AI
- Computer and machine vision
- Next gen batteries
- Advanced robotics
- Autonomous mobility and logistics

Select 2025 market signals

- Amazon pilots Blue Jay, a robotics system capable of coordinating multiple robotic arms to perform many tasks at once.
- Google releases Gemini Robotics 1.5, aiming to bring advanced reasoning capabilities for physical tasks.
- Beijing hosts the World Humanoid Robot Games, showcasing the progress in AI and robotics.
- An autonomous robot surgeon was able to remove a gallbladder without assistance on a realistic human-like model.
- Figure's CEO says there is a path to shipping 100,000 humanoid robots over the next 4 years.

Tech trend 3

We, robot



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - Unveiling of humanoid robots of increasing dexterity, adaptability and intelligence.
- 2027** - Ramp up of robotic production and deployment of robots into society albeit still low scale.
- 2028** - Testing of autonomous cars scales and limited pilots of robotaxis in the UK.
- 2028** - Autonomous drones are deployed by logistics organisation, initially for commercial deliveries.
- 2032** - Autonomous cars get go ahead in the UK within certain cities. Domestic robots become available.
- 2032** - Regulation passed on the use and safety of robots for commercial and domestic use.
- 2035** - Use of robots in healthcare and education gets approved in the UK.

Our analysis: the manual labour force of the future

Robotics will be far more than an idle curiosity; it will reshape a wide range of sectors.

In industry, autonomous and intelligent robots that collaborate will enhance productivity and be able to achieve 24/7 supply chains.

Initially expensive and limited in utility, humanoid robots will quickly fall in cost as they become more widely available. They will be utilised across commerce, but care will be needed to maintain personal experiences. And many mundane domestic tasks will be delegated to robots.

Expect to see robots used in education and healthcare to address labour shortages and nanorobots could revolutionise medicine.

However, challenges will slow down progress with concern over the role and safety of robots coming under the spotlight. Robot rights will become a divisive national conversation.

Tech trend 4

An ambience of smart devices



A device revolution will herald a fundamental change to the way we interact with the world.

As AI advances and scales, smart devices will evolve to optimise how we engage with and utilise AI.

This will see a shift from App ecosystems to an AI native operating system and a move away from smartphones to other forms of devices including smart glasses and screen-free devices.

These changes will lead to a more immersive way of living and working, with augmented reality providing a richer, information-rich environment.

AI will be at the heart of this, not only reacting to users but pre-empting needs, being always-on but designed not to be intrusive.

Devices will be connected to form a seamless ‘ambient operating layer’ that supports the needs of people and organisations.

The way we interact with the environment and our devices will become multimodal, shifting from text to include voice and gesture, and longer-term – straight from the tomes of science fiction – using thought directly.

Select tech signals

- Multimodal AI
- Edge AI
- Smart devices
- Extended reality tech
- Spatial computing
- Internet of Things

Select 2025 market signals

- Amazon developing smart glasses to support delivery driver activities with advanced computer vision processing and AI integration.
- Samsung unveils an AI native XR headset, the first to be built on Android’s XR operating system at a lower point than the Vision Pro.
- Meta unveils its Ray-Ban Display glasses, the first to feature an integrated display and on-wrist control.
- OpenAI announces it is collaborating with Jony Ive to develop a pocket-sized, contextually aware and screen-free AI device.
- Deutsche Telekom pilot an app-less smartphone with AI as the native operating system.

Tech trend 4

An ambience of smart devices



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - Smart glasses become useful, with hardware and software advances. Adoption starts to take off.
- 2027** - Screen-less, ambient smart devices come onto the market.
- 2028** - XR devices become mainstream, with developers creating context-aware apps that blend seamlessly into real-world environments, enhancing functionality and user experience.
- 2029** - Public concern over privacy mounts over always-on smart devices and regulation is initiated to balance those concerns with the economic implications.
- 2034** - Commercial ecosystem fully transitions from e-commerce to xr-commerce. Healthcare and education using XR device channels and functionality.
- 2035** - Non-invasive neural interfaces used to interact with machines directly begin to become commercially available.

Our analysis: adapting to a world of immersive information

In the same way that smartphones changed the way that people and organisations behaved, the transformation of devices will become a force for societal change.

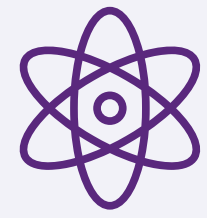
These connected smart devices will become the core infrastructure across which the world will operate, acting as the nexus of information exchange between people, businesses, government and healthcare.

Service providers will need to adapt their infrastructure to adapt to these new devices, providing channels that allow for immersive engagement and experiences, and being able to deliver personalised services at the precise moment they are needed or desired. Devices will support inclusivity, with devices changing the way visually, hearing, and agility-impaired individuals live their lives.

Inevitably, there will be challenges. Privacy and security will be foremost, with user consent being more complex but more necessary than ever before.

Tech trend 5

Quantum of opportunity



Quantum isn't just another way of computing, it has the potential to benefit the whole of society.

Quantum computing is a radically different approach to computing, using the characteristics of quantum particles to tackle problems far beyond the reach of classical machines.

On the cusp of being realised for many years, there is real momentum towards genuine commercial capability, with significant investment into increasing power, reducing the error rates inherent in the design and addressing a myriad of practical challenges.

So, what will quantum bring?

Real-world problems that require complex modelling and/or optimisation will be revolutionised by quantum computing.

From optimising financial decisions to drug discovery. From advanced machine learning to climate modelling. From optimising traffic flows to better supply chain logistics.

But it will also render current encryption techniques obsolete ('the encryption cliff') necessitating a worldwide shift to quantum-proof encryption.

Select tech signals

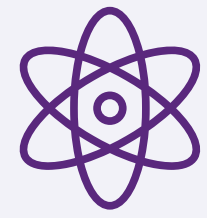
- Quantum computing
- Cloud computing
- Digital twin tech
- Quantum encryption
- Post-quantum encryption
- Quantum communication

Select 2025 market signals

- Google develops a quantum algorithm that performed a task 13,000x quicker than the fastest supercomputer.
- Quantum Motion announces the development of a quantum computer based on standard silicon chips.
- The UK govt to invest over £500m in quantum computing over 4 years to strengthen national security and economic resilience.
- IBM and AMD announce a partnership to develop quantum-centric supercomputing architectures.
- Microsoft announces that quantum capability is mere years away and a pathway to a 1m qubit chip, with its new Majorana chip that claims to significantly reduce error rates even at scale.

Tech trend 5

Quantum of opportunity



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - Increased encrypted data theft in preparation of quantum capability to circumvent the encryption.
- 2027** - Scaling of commercial pilots applying quantum computing in finance and tech firms.
- 2029** - Quantum capability with consistent quantum advantage arrives, with a step up in the number of qubits and error rates being well-managed.
- 2032** - 100k qubit computers emerge.
- 2032** - Quantum helps to discover new drugs.
- 2033** - The encryption cliff arrives, where quantum capability can unlock traditional RSA encryption techniques and is leveraged by criminals.
- 2033** - Quantum computing creates a step up in AI capability – so-called quantum AI.

Our analysis: getting ahead early will be essential

Quantum computing won't merely be a new way of solving problems, in many ways it will be a game-changer across a surprisingly wide range of areas.

Given the intensity of research, investment and activity, we predict that commercially useful quantum computing will start to come online before the end of the decade. We expect a marked uptick in economic output from those economies that employ quantum computing as boosts to AI capability, finance, logistics and pharmaceuticals, amongst others, make an impact.

Beyond commerce, quantum computing will boost the ability to develop drugs and deal with many problems in nature, for example in tackling climate change.

We expect early use of quantum computing will be critical across many sectors to maintain competitiveness.

Tech trend 6

More than a token change



New digital-based infrastructure is set to create the commercial ecosystem of the future.

One of the reasons that crypto has gained momentum is the use of novel technologies, notably programmable ledgers (such as blockchain) and digital assets (a digital representation of an asset on a programmable ledger).

These technologies are gaining traction in financial markets, and we expect will become standard infrastructure over time. Blockchain is also starting to be used in broader commercial settings, particularly where transparency across multiple parties is beneficial such as in the supply chain.

These ‘digital markets’ provide a host of potential benefits, including speed, efficiency, transparency and flexibility (through programming capability).

But there are challenges, with privacy and security being notable. Advances in digital trust will support these digital markets.

We think that digital identity will be central to this, providing confidence in digital markets but also offering a more seamless and personalised approach not only to commerce but also for public services and healthcare.

Select tech signals

- Programmable ledgers
- Smart contracts
- Digital assets
- Digital wallets
- Digital identity
- Zero knowledge proofs

Select 2025 market signals

- Swift, a cornerstone of financial markets, announces a pilot with 30 institutions to develop a blockchain-based ledger, initially focused on cross-border payments.
- Several large fintechs, Circle and Stripe included, announce development of layer 1 blockchains optimised for financial services.
- Galaxy Digital becomes the first Nasdaq-listed company to tokenise its stock on-chain as actual class A shares.
- Stripe acquires Bridge, a stablecoin platform and subsequently offers stablecoin financial accounts in 101 countries.
- The US administration promotes USD stablecoins and legislation is passed to provide a clear regulatory framework.

Tech trend 6

More than a token change



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - Use of stablecoins increases, mostly in crossborder transactions and in countries with less stable economies.
- 2028** - Use of blockchain and digital assets across finance becomes mainstream, with capital markets and funds leading the way.
- 2029** - Digital ID for individuals becomes increasingly used to access services. Digital ID for companies and AI agents emerge.
- 2030** - Increasing use of digital money as tokenised deposits emerge; the digital euro is launched.
- 2030** - As AI agents become embedded into commercial systems, the use of blockchain and digital assets ramps up.
- 2033** - The next iteration of the internet, Web 3.0, using blockchain, gains traction and commercial systems follow.
- 2035** - Transformation in UK home buying as blockchain significantly speeds up the process.

Our analysis: digital markets go beyond finance

Blockchain and digital assets are very much associated with Bitcoin and the crypto world. But no longer.

For financial services, these digital markets will become an important infrastructure, although care will be needed to derive benefits for both organisations and their customers.

For other sectors, the use cases may be less obvious, but any situation where data is shared across multiple parties is likely to benefit from these technologies, with useful application from areas as diverse as supply chain and healthcare.

Privacy enhancing technologies will become essential to building trust in this digital world. Digital identity will be a key part of this, offering more than just security, but also enhanced customer engagement and experience. The use of digital identity does not imply a loss of privacy, and new tech such as zero knowledge proofs will help to protect privacy.

Tech trend 7

Empowering the tech future



The drive to enable AI will lead to innovation in areas such as energy that will have broader societal benefits.

Our society is on the verge of tech-driven change, with AI and digital environments becoming dominant features. For this future to be realised, there will need to be changes to the foundational enablers which will both drive, and be driven by, the other tech trends.

Foremost amongst those is the need for energy to power the new tech. Already demand for energy to power AI and computing is driving innovation, and we expect developments in energy sourcing and efficiency to be a key feature of the next decade and beyond.

The hardware needed to support the tech trends currently requires the use of rare metals. As demand increases, and geopolitical tensions rise, we see a trend towards the development of alternate materials, be it more common materials, metamaterials or the use of biomaterial.

We also expect to see a shift in workforce skills to support the tech trends and in the future world once change has been realised. Although what this looks like is still uncertain, adaptability and ability to change skills is likely going to be a core need.

Select tech signals

- Advanced energy storage solutions
- Next gen batteries
- Smart grids
- Metamaterials
- 6G connectivity

Select 2025 market signals

- The UK Atomic Energy Authority announces multiple breakthroughs in the national fusion experiment, MAST upgrade.
- Renewable energy overtakes coal as the world's leading source of electricity in the first half of 2025.
- Google announces it will buy half the output from Commonwealth Fusion System's first commercial power plant, expected to come online in the early 2030s.
- Cortical Labs launches the world's first biocomputer, powered by human neurons grown in a lab.
- The first smart electricity substation is installed in the UK, using AI and machine learning to optimise power distribution.

Tech trend 7

Empowering the tech future



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2026** - Scaled production and application of sodium-ion batteries.
- 2029** - Solid state batteries start becoming available, providing higher capacity and longer lasting power sources.
- 2030** - The commencement of the process towards a shift in workforce skills to adapt to changes to the labour market from tech innovation.
- 2030** - Smart grids become more effective and efficient as quantum computing capability creates unparalleled optimisation of energy distribution.
- 2034** - 6G networks launch, enabling scaled always-on, real-time immersive experiences, driving forward digital engagement no matter the location.
- 2038** - Stable, industrially viable nuclear fusion is achieved in trials, heralding the beginning of the journey towards nuclear fusion as a primary energy source.

Our analysis: an energy revolution to impact us all

We are already seeing the addressing of AI and compute energy demands as a tech sector priority. This is taking two approaches: the sourcing of and generation of new energy sources and more energy efficient compute.

As investment increases into the first, we see innovation in renewables generating more efficient outputs. But it is the focus on nuclear fusion power that will be paradigm-shifting as it will generate sufficient power to meet all the world's energy needs – the geopolitical ramifications will be huge; we currently see viable nuclear fusion by the end of the next decade. At the same time, we see biocomputing innovation yielding low energy computing along similar timelines, overcoming rare earth material geopolitical-driven constraints.

Despite fears of an AI takeover, human talent will still be crucial for some time to come and bold education policies and workplace skills support will be required to facilitate the shift in skills needed.

Tech trend 8

A life well (and long) lived



New healthcare techniques leading to rising longevity could have significant societal implications.

A wide range of technologies are rapidly changing what is possible in healthcare, not just in medicine, but in how data is recorded and analysed, how patient care is delivered and how patient health is tracked.

For example, revolutionary gene editing techniques, such as CRISPR, allow for precise manipulation of DNA and treatment of genetic diseases. And advancements in AI are having wide-ranging benefits, from guiding robotic surgery to drug discovery, from early and precise diagnostics to more efficient administration.

Smart wearables already have medical-orientated apps that enable real-time tracking of vital signs and activity, and the capability and breadth of application will increase as devices and AI evolve.

The expectation is that these developments will lead to a substantive step up in life expectancy, especially for those born in the next decade and beyond, and this will have far-reaching implications including for government policies, financial planning, job markets, the housing market and to food production.

Select tech signals

- Personalised medicine and genomics
- Gene editing and modification
- AI diagnostics
- Robotics in surgery
- Internet of medical things
- Wearable health tech

Select 2025 market signals

- Gene therapy used to treat Huntingdon's disease for the first time, with the disease slowed in 75% of patients in trials.
- With the support of AI tools, UK clinical trial approval times are halved, bringing life-saving treatments to patients earlier.
- UK researchers develop a stethoscope that uses AI to detect major heart conditions in seconds.
- Doctors in the US become the first to treat a child with a severe genetic disorder using a customised gene-editing therapy.
- The Hilo wristband becomes the first cuffless blood pressure monitor sanctioned for over-the-counter use by the FDA.

Tech trend 8

A life well (and long) lived



Our view of how this trend could unfold

- 2028** - Medical grade health tracking devices begin to be embedded into consumer smart wearables.
- 2030** - Device AI and health tracking combine to provide real-time medical information to professionals and boost virtual healthcare.
- 2032** - Gene editing and modification scale and create an ability to step up treatment of a range of genetic diseases and weaknesses.
- 2032** - AI becomes embedded across the healthcare journey, creating significant efficiencies, speedier diagnosis, personalised treatment and care strategies.
- 2035** - A combination of advanced AI, additive manufacturing techniques and detailed real-time biometrics lead to a shift to true personalised medicines.
- 2035** - Average life expectancy increases by c25 years for those born from 2035; for others it's up by c10 years vs 2020.

Our analysis: higher life expectancy to drive societal change

There has long been an upward trend in life expectancy, driven by medical advances as well as environmental, lifestyle and socioeconomic changes.

But new advances in technology are going to create a substantive and rapid increase in life expectancy as continuous tracking, rapid and powerful diagnostics and personalised treatments take hold.

That is obviously positive, but it will lead to some hugely challenging socioeconomic issues to address with a sharp increase in population and change in demographics.

This will mean a radical re-think of labour markets, pensions and investments. There may be environmental pressures as housing and food supply become constrained. And the commercial world will need to adjust to these demographic changes.

Section 4

NatWest and innovation



04/ NatWest and innovation

This report, and the work undertaken by NatWest Group's Open Innovation team, aims to understand and translate what external change will mean for our customers and the bank. By keeping close to emerging trends, we safely experiment with new technologies, partner with and strategically invest in innovative companies and build meaningful new ventures. Here are some of our recent strategic partnerships:



FourTwoThree is a sustainability and resilience platform that connects banks and institutions to their SME customers or suppliers using primary digital engagement to understand, manage, and improve climate and transition risk and unlock opportunities for systemic change. Around 400 million SMEs form the backbone of the global economy, representing over 95% of all businesses and providing 60–70% of employment worldwide. Collectively they account for roughly half of commercial energy use and 40–60% of business-sector emissions.

FourTwoThree is backed by NatWest Group, National Australia Bank and SC Ventures.

“Climate action becomes possible when we make it accessible. Connecting SMEs to better support, accessible financing and emerging climate innovation will simply make them better and more engaged customers, suppliers and employers”

Glyn Baker, CEO of FourTwoThree.



Serene is an early-stage AI platform dedicated to tackling financial vulnerability. Through real-time customer insights driven by AI and behavioural science, the platform predicts arrears across cards, loans, and overdrafts 60+ days earlier than traditional indicators, with up to ~90% predictive accuracy, enabling financial institutions to deliver personalised, timely support at scale.

With support from the Natwest Accelerator and Open Innovation, Serene refined its product and strategy,

secured strategic investment and is working with the business on how we better serve customers. Through a pilot with Serene, 85% of the customer group felt more confident about their financial future, and financial stress scores dropped by 40% within six months.

“Partnering with NatWest allowed us to demonstrate how AI can proactively support financial resilience and well-being at scale.”

Savannah Price, CEO of Serene.



Tunic Pay helps banks stop scams and accelerate genuine payments using real-time payment intelligence. With context-rich insights, recipient verification, and scam-specific decisioning, they aim to prevent fraud before it happens. Through Open Innovation's Growth Programme, Tunic Pay had access to the banks resources, expertise and networks and is working with the business on how we better serve customers.

Though a pilot with TunicPay, case handling times were reduced by 10–15%, preventing well over £300k in fraud losses, with not a single payaway to date! We also achieved 90%+ agent adoption, showing how innovation delivers real-world impact for customers and colleagues alike.

“The programme catalysed our deep partnership with the bank, giving us access to invaluable feedback, mentorship, and new opportunities.”

Nico Barawid & Nicky Goulimis, Tunic Pay Co-Founders.



NatWest
Group

Emerging Tech Trends 2026

For further information about this report,
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We've prepared this report to share our views and insights on emerging technology trends. The trends and views we discuss may change as the technology landscape evolves. It is not investment, legal, tax or other professional advice and it should not be used as the basis for any business or investment decisions. NatWest Group accepts no responsibility for any loss arising from its use.

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