

Meet the Leader:

David Stanley

As featured in The Times

ELE Advanced Technologies (ELE) is one of the UK's growing manufacturers, helping the country retain its reputation for first-class engineering. "Manufacturing is far from dead," says CEO David Stanley. "As a nation, we are really good at it, and 80 per cent of the products we make at ELE are exported."

ELE creates complex parts for various types of aircraft. The feats of engineering are staggering to the layman – some feature tiny holes, as fine as human hair, which help cool the system and reduce CO2 emissions. "These holes are invisible to the naked eye," David says.

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ELE CEO David Stanley is proud to be carrying on a great British tradition in engineering

Founded in the 1950s, ELE originally supplied parts to Rolls-Royce. Over time, demand for these simple components waned. "They were manufactured in Asia, becoming highly commoditised," says David. "That forced ELE to move into more complex products."

Expanding the Business

David joined ELE as finance director in 2016, when the business employed 99 staff. Over the past five years, he has helped diversify the firm's activities. "When I joined, we were focused on making parts for industrial gas turbines and the automotive industry," he says. Alongside Manesh Pandya, the former CEO, he refocused the business to appeal to a wider range of sectors, including power generation, defence and both civil and business aviation.

"We have also concentrated on supporting customers from the very start of a project, all the way through its lifecycle," David adds. ELE can create small batches of components, perfect for the prototyping stage, but can also manufacture at high volumes when these new inventions hit full-scale production. "That's helped change our growth profile significantly."

Finding the Right Private Equity Partner

ELE required investment in order to satisfy all these new customers. David and his team began fundraising in 2018, meeting trade buyers and potential investors. But ELE's business model confounded some of the potential backers. "Our competitors tend to be our customers, which makes for a peculiar market dynamic," admits David.

ELE went on to partner with LDC, the private equity investor that is part of Lloyds Banking Group, securing investment in early 2019. "The big consideration for us was finding a partner who offered more than just money," David says. "What impressed us was their understanding of our sector dynamics. We make safety-critical components, so there can be a significant delay between winning a contract and payback. LDC has a flexible approach and isn't looking for a quick exit. Not all the private equity houses we met were like that."



Focussing on ESG

ELE has since moved its 160 staff into a new state-of-the-art facility in Nelson, Lancashire. "All our electricity is now from certified renewable sources, over a third is self-generating, and we use heat recovery from our machines to heat the new building extension," says David. "Ninety per cent of our waste is now recycled."

Being a greener company has helped ELE win more ambitious projects than ever before. "Not only are we a responsible company, but we are working on the technologies that will help our customers to reach net zero," says David.

Continued Growth

Revenues at the company hit £25 million last year. "We have trebled our top line and expanded our penetration into new sectors, and we couldn't have done that without the support of our investment partner," David says.

ELE has also attracted two former Rolls-Royce heavy hitters to its board. "We have come full circle, and supply Rolls-Royce once more," says David. There's no danger of its components becoming commoditised this time around, he adds: "We manufacture to a tolerance of microns [one millionth of a metre]."

David, who became CEO in October, hopes to crack the United States soon. "It's an untapped market for us and we have several potential routes in," he says. But ELE is looking even further afield – beyond the stratosphere. "We have the capacity to double our output in our new facility," he says. "We can take what we do, working with hard-to-machine metal, and move into many new sectors – medical, nuclear, even space travel. The next ten years are going to be huge for us."

