

ASSET SERVICING TIMES

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Beyond T+1

Message Labs CEO Kevin Wooldridge looks at why market transformation must become a durable, message-aware capability



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State Street and QNB form alliance

State Street and QNB Group have announced an alliance to introduce a new custody servicing model in Qatar, today at the World Economic Forum (WEF). Under this co-operation agreement, State Street and QNB Group have agreed to collaborate, with service agreements to be finalised and executed at a later date.

Bringing together State Street's global scale and QNB's local insight, this alliance aims at enhancing service delivery for clients and reinforcing the two institutions' combined presence in Qatar's financial market.

Ron O'Hanley, chairman and CEO at State Street, says: "This new servicing model creates significant synergies, enabling us to deliver enhanced solutions to clients across the region.

"QNB's scale and network in Qatar are important to State Street as we invest further to support GCC clients in capturing opportunities driven by the region's economic transformation."

Abdulla Mubarak Al-Khalifa, CEO at QNB Group, adds: "This strategic alliance with State Street marks a pivotal moment for QNB Group and is fully aligned with our vision for sustained international expansion and market leadership.

"By leveraging State Street's world-class global custody and value-added services, we are significantly enhancing our operational capabilities and service offering.

"This collaboration is instrumental in further solidifying our position as a dominant financial institution both locally and across our expanding international footprint, allowing us to leverage State Street's global expertise to expand our offerings and strengthen client relations, driving robust growth in key markets outside of Qatar.

"We are creating a superior servicing model that reflects our unwavering commitment to strategic partnerships, while maximizing stakeholder value on a global scale." ■

ASSET SERVICING TIMES

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Jupiter appoints BNY to deliver streamlined operating model

BNY, a global financial services company, has announced a multi-year agreement with Jupiter Fund Management, a specialist, active asset manager, to provide a suite of operational services that will support the asset manager's goal to enhance its operating platform.

Through this strategic relationship, Jupiter has consolidated back-office services for its offshore jurisdictions with BNY as well as outsourcing its middle office operations.

BNY will now provide a suite of capabilities across custody, fund administration, transfer agency and depositary services, specialised middle office, investment operations, and data management.

This close collaboration with BNY has been developed to streamline Jupiter's operating platform and support the asset manager in achieving its strategic objectives of building scale, enhancing efficiencies, and improving the experience for its clients.

Clearstream and Hamilton Lane partner

Clearstream, the post-trade services provider of Deutsche Börse Group, is collaborating with global private markets investment firm Hamilton Lane. The partnership brings Hamilton Lane's European evergreen fund offering to Clearstream's integrated fund distribution platform, which will improve operational efficiency and provide access for a broader range of clients seeking private markets exposure.

Clearstream's expanding network of over 300 distribution partners and the investors they service will now have access to Hamilton Lane's Private Markets Access European Long-Term Investment Fund (ELTIF).

Ralph Aerni, head of Client Solutions for EMEA at Hamilton Lane states: "Building on over three decades in private markets and an ever-expanding evergreen platform with a strong presence in EMEA, we are pleased to partner with Clearstream to offer our Private Markets Access ELTIF Fund. As we continue to focus on expanding access to private markets, Clearstream's infrastructure and reach will help us serve an even wider audience of investors seeking the differentiated risk and return profile that private markets can provide."

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Dubai Insurance partners with Zodia Custody to launch digital wallet

Dubai Insurance says it has launched the first digital wallet for crypto assets in the UAE insurance sector, developed in partnership with Zodia Custody. The new digital wallet facilitates secure, transparent receipt of premiums and payment of insurance claims in digital assets.

This initiative — which integrates digital asset capabilities into the

firm’s insurance operations — introduces a regulated infrastructure that allows policyholders to seamlessly transact using digital assets, while ensuring high standards of security, governance, and transparency.

Through the partnership with Zodia Custody, Dubai Insurance is provided access to a secure, compliant institutional-grade custody platform.

ADCB Egypt goes live with Temenos Payments Hub

Temenos, a banking technology firm, has announced that ADCB Egypt, a subsidiary of Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank Group, has gone live with Temenos Payments Hub to modernise its payments infrastructure and enable faster and more efficient cross border payments. The implementation enables ADCB Egypt to process SWIFT payments for its retail and business customers using the ISO 20022 MX messaging standard.

The new MX format provides richer, structured data for improved accuracy and interoperability between banks, says the firm.

Additionally it says that by adopting ISO 20022-ready capabilities within Temenos Payments Hub, ADCB Egypt achieves higher straight-through-processing (STP), minimising manual intervention and accelerating settlement times for customers.

The solution also provides ADCB Egypt with centralised orchestration of payment flows, improving visibility and control. Its technology handles the bank’s growing transaction volumes and supports expansion to other payment types within a single enterprise hub.

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BBH Investor Services and SimCorp forge strategic alliance

Brown Brothers Harriman (BBH) and SimCorp have announced a strategic alliance to address the needs of global asset managers requiring an integrated, end-to-end technology, data, and services solution.

Enhancing both firms' existing offerings, this solution uses BBH Infomediary to integrate SimCorp One's front and middle office capabilities, including a real-time Investment Book of Records managed by SimCorp's managed business services, with BBH's fund servicing and custody suite.

BBH Infomediary, BBH's connectivity and data integration engine, will also enable an open architecture model that helps connect clients to third party technologies and service providers.

The first asset manager to access this combined solution is systematic manager, Quoniam Asset Management, in support of their recently announced UniActive Q ETF launch.

Silke Weiser-Walther, chief operating officer at Quoniam, adds: "We are delighted that two of our valued strategic providers have come together to deliver a more efficient end-to-end workflow. With their support, we can ensure that our innovative ETF products are underpinned by robust infrastructure and real time, accurate data, empowering us to deliver enhanced outcomes for our clients."

Shawn McNinch, partner at BBH, remarks: "For managers seeking to streamline their technology and operations across the entire investment lifecycle, this offering delivers scalability, accelerates data strategies, and allows a sharper focus on investment results."

Oliver Johnson, chief revenue officer, at SimCorp, says: "We are excited to extend the benefits of our SimCorp One platform further into our clients' operating model with BBH's asset servicing and Infomediary data integration capabilities to create an end-to-end solution."



HSBC Securities Services secures onshore mutual fund custody mandate

HSBC secured its first onshore mutual fund custody mandate in mainland China, having been chosen as custodian bank for a fund issued by E Fund Management.

The firm says the mutual fund market in mainland China continues to demonstrate growth, reaching 37.02 trillion renminbi (US\$5.3 trillion) as of the end of November 2025, citing statistics from the Asset Management Association of China (AMAC).

Ivy Zhang, co-head of Markets and Securities Services, HSBC China, shares: "China is the second largest asset and wealth management market globally. With enormous growth potential, we're well-positioned to provide mutual fund managers with integrated financial services."

This new mutual fund marks E Fund's first onshore mutual fund to partner with a foreign custodian bank, a milestone for both organisations.



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State Street and ADIO launch Al Ain hub

State Street Corporation, a provider of financial services to institutional investors, has signed a support agreement with the Abu Dhabi Investment Office (ADIO) to establish a new operating center in the Al Ain region, Abu Dhabi. The firm says the collaboration marks a step in its long-term expansion strategy in the Middle East and United Arab Emirates (UAE), and reinforces its role as a strategic partner within the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) ecosystem.

As part of its long-term growth plan in Abu Dhabi and aligning to State Street’s global clients’ increasing presence in Abu Dhabi, the new operating hub will create more than 300 financial services roles over the next four years, providing career pathways for local Emirati talent.

This collaboration also forms part of ADIO’s FinTech, Insurance, Digital and Alternative Assets (FIDA) cluster, a platform to develop exportable financial capabilities and create

a future-facing financial services ecosystem.

By 2045, the cluster is projected to contribute an additional 56 billion UAE dirham to Abu Dhabi’s gross domestic product (GDP) and attract at least AED17 billion in investment, aligned with the emirate’s wider economic diversification agenda.

In addition, State Street will collaborate with local universities to create career and internship opportunities for graduates, as well as organise training and seminars to help develop local young talent, aligning with Abu Dhabi’s priority to build a knowledge-based workforce.

Ron O’Hanley, chairman and CEO of State Street, remarks: “Abu Dhabi, including Al Ain, is a strategic priority for State Street, and we believe our experience in global financial centres can support the emirate’s continued development as an important global financial hub.”

Euroclear welcomes Lunate as Middle Eastern ETF issuer

Euroclear has announced that Lunate has launched its Irish-domiciled ETFs on Euroclear’s funds platform.

The post-trade service provider says the Abu Dhabi-based global investment management firm is the first in the Middle East region to issue an undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) ETF under the International Central Securities Depository (ICSD) model, using Euroclear’s infrastructure and global distribution network.

By launching its funds on a platform for International Exchange Traded Funds (iETFs), Lunate will be able to use an efficient distribution network within Europe, gaining access to major markets in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Lunate’s Boreas thematic ETFs range is designed to provide diversified exposure to long-term, structural themes expected to drive future economic value.

The growing Boreas range currently includes three ETFs, offered across multiple listing venues and trading currencies.

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Beyond T+1

Why market change is never ‘done’

Kevin Wooldridge, co-founder and CEO of Message Labs, looks at why market transformation must become a durable, message-aware capability rather than a series of one-off programmes

Financial markets are the backbone of the global economy. But it is financial messaging that keeps those markets functioning: the nervous system carrying instructions, confirmations, exceptions, and reports between institutions, day after day, at values running into the hundreds of billions of pounds.

That nervous system is about to be put under severe and sustained strain.

UK and European markets are preparing for one of the most significant operational shifts in recent memory as settlement moves to T+1 in October 2027.

Accelerated settlement dominates the headlines, but it should not be mistaken for a single, self-contained event. T+1 is simply the next change in a longer sequence, and firms that treat it as a one-off risk being caught out again and again.

Adopting T+1 settlement already represents a substantial challenge for financial firms and is materially different from the move from T+3 to T+2 a decade ago. Under T+2, firms still had a full business day after trading to input and enrich trades, resolve mismatches, confirm allocations, and arrange funding. Under T+1, all of that activity must take place on trade date itself, with settlement following early the next morning.

The processes may be familiar, but the tolerances are not. Manual intervention becomes far harder, exception handling far less forgiving, and operational resilience far more exposed. Automation, straight-through processing (STP), and reliability move from being desirable to essential.

And T+1 is only part of the picture.

ISO 2022 adoption continues to gain traction across asset classes and infrastructures, while core market utilities such as CREST are undergoing significant transformation. Many firms are also contending with corporate activity, divestments, and mergers that drive system migrations, as well as the long-overdue replacement of ageing legacy platforms that were never designed for today's volumes, data richness, or regulatory scrutiny. Alongside all of this, the industry faces the potential for another technology inflection point, as blockchain-based settlement models and advances in artificial intelligence promise — or threaten — to rewrite long-established operating models.

Crucially, major market changes rarely end with implementation. ISO 2022 is a case in point. Its initial rollout is already giving way to a multi-year roadmap extending well beyond 2029, covering structured addresses, enhanced exception handling, investigations, and richer end-to-end data. What can look like a destination often turns out to be a waypoint.

Taken together, these initiatives represent far more than incremental ‘plumbing upgrades’. They affect how firms trade, settle, fund, and manage risk, and how effectively they interact with counterparties, infrastructures, and clients. They also place sustained pressure on technology teams, operations, compliance, and change functions, often simultaneously.

So how should firms respond?

The answer is not to build a bespoke programme for each new initiative, nor to repeatedly mobilise large, short-lived transformation teams that disband once a deadline has passed. Instead, firms need to establish a durable, repeatable change capability built around three core disciplines.

“All participants need a clear, ongoing view of what changes are coming, when they are likely to crystallise, and how they intersect with their own business model, systems, and counterparties”

Horizon-scanning and impact analysis

All participants need a clear, ongoing view of what changes are coming, when they are likely to crystallise, and how they intersect with their own business model, systems, and counterparties. Market-wide changes are unforgiving: fall behind, and participation itself becomes difficult. Effective horizon scanning is not just about tracking regulatory announcements, but about understanding dependencies, sequencing, and cumulative impact, particularly where multiple initiatives converge on the same systems or processes.

Controlled design and delivery

Change at this scale is not simply a resourcing problem. It is a prioritisation and governance challenge. Decisions about what to build, defer, enhance, or retire can only be made sensibly when impacts are well understood and trade-offs are explicit. This requires disciplined architecture, clear ownership, and an acceptance that not everything can or should be customised for every change. Companies that succeed are often those that standardise where possible and invest in adaptable foundations rather than brittle point solutions.

Assurance

Quality cannot be bolted on at the end of a programme. It must run through requirements definition, design, build, and testing, across systems, processes, and people. The US and Canadian transition to T+1 in May 2024 underlined this point, highlighting the need to test not only core trade and settlement flows but also adjacent processes such as corporate actions, securities lending, treasury operations, and liquidity management. Weaknesses often emerge not at the centre of a process, but at its edges.

Taken on their own, these challenges are severe enough. But the added dimension of financial messaging makes them harder still.

Message-based processes cannot be designed or tested in isolation. Every message has at least two parties, both of whom must share a precise and aligned understanding of functional behaviour, data content, timing, and non-functional characteristics such as resilience and throughput. End-to-end processes may involve multiple parties in multiple roles, escalating both complexity and coordination effort. A single equity trade, for example, may involve the exchange of messages with a trading venue, a central counterparty, a custodian or central securities depository, and multiple internal systems.

This is an area where many change programmes struggle. Testing is often constrained by limited access to counterparties, incomplete specifications, or an assumption that the message will work as it always has. Yet, experience suggests that this assumption is increasingly risky. As settlement cycles compress and message volumes increase, small ambiguities or inconsistencies in message handling can have outsized operational impact.

This is why firms need tools and approaches that treat financial messaging as a fundamental component of change, not simply a constraint to be worked around. Impact analysis, architecture, design, and assurance must extend across organisational and institutional boundaries, not stop at the edge of a single application. Message specifications, flows, and behaviours need to be understood, versioned, and tested with the same rigour as internal systems.

T+1 is coming, but it will not be the last market change to test the organisational and operational resilience of participants. Firms that invest now in an enduring, message-aware change capability will be better placed not just to comply with the next deadline, but to adapt repeatedly and at pace — whatever the market demands next.

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Project Agorá

Led by the BIS, Project Agorá is exploring whether tokenised money and a unified ledger model can address the long-standing inefficiencies of wholesale cross-border payments

Zarah Choudhary reports





Cross-border payments sit at the heart of global finance, yet the infrastructure underpinning them remains one of the most fragmented and inefficient parts of the financial system.

Despite decades of incremental improvements, wholesale payments between banks still rely heavily on correspondent banking chains that can span multiple institutions, jurisdictions and time zones, creating delays, opacity, and operational risk.

It is against this backdrop that Project Agorá, led by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), is exploring whether tokenised money and a unified ledger model could provide a more efficient foundation for wholesale cross-border settlement.

The initiative brings together seven central banks and more than 40 private-sector financial institutions in what has become the BIS Innovation Hub's largest and most complex project to date.

While still firmly in the experimental phase, Project Agorá offers an insight into how the settlement layer of global payments could evolve — not by displacing banks or existing structures, but by modernising the infrastructure that connects them.

Why cross-border payments remain a structural problem

For banks and their corporate clients, cross-border payments remain slow, costly, and difficult to track. Transactions often pass through several correspondent banks, each introducing its own checks, cut-off times, and fees, while settlement across currencies typically occurs asynchronously.

Claire Gates, global head of payments at Crown Agents Bank, points to the cumulative impact of this fragmentation. “Cross-border payments across multiple markets are inherently complex — often taking three to five days depending on the region, lacking transparency, and incurring significant costs as multiple intermediaries take their margins,” she says.

“This initiative can help unify and enhance the overall process, as tokenisation improves efficiency both financially and structurally.”

Beyond delays and cost, the structure of correspondent banking ties up liquidity as banks pre-fund accounts across jurisdictions to manage settlement risk. Time zone differences exacerbate these pressures, while resolving exceptions or failed payments often requires manual intervention.

“The promise of Agorá is to test whether you can move value between countries more like a single and coordinated process instead of a relay race”

Julia Demidova, FIS

According to Julia Demidova, senior director for digital assets product and strategy at FIS, today’s model resembles a relay race rather than a coordinated process. “Each step adds checks, cut-off times, fees, delays and uncertainty. If something goes wrong, it’s hard to see where it got stuck and fixing it often means manual investigations and interventions,” she says.

What Project Agorá is — and what it is not

Project Agorá is focused squarely on wholesale, not retail, payments. It does not involve consumer-facing Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs), public crypto networks or securities trading platforms. Instead, it is testing whether a multi-currency unified ledger could improve the way banks settle cross-border payments with one another.

At the core of the project is the tokenisation of two forms of money: commercial bank deposits, represented digitally as tokenised bank money and wholesale central bank money, providing a safe settlement asset anchored to reserves

These tokenised instruments are brought together on a programmable platform designed to support atomic settlement — meaning that payment and settlement occur simultaneously, or not at all.

Demidova emphasises that this design choice is deliberate.

“What makes it different from a lot of other tokenisation or digital asset projects is that it’s not trying to replace banks or build an alternative payment rail,” she says.

“It’s experiment-led, through the BIS, designed to work with the existing two-tier system. Commercial banks still provide services, but the settlement layer is modernised.”

In other words, Project Agorá is not about reinventing money, but about improving how money moves between institutions.

Why tokenisation matters in wholesale payments

In the context of Project Agorá, tokenisation is not treated as a buzzword, but as a mechanism for collapsing multiple steps in the payment process into a single operation. By embedding rules for ownership, transfer, and compliance directly into tokenised money, the project aims to reduce reconciliation, duplication, and operational risk.

“The promise of Agorá is to test whether you can move value between countries more like a single and coordinated process instead of a relay race,” says Demidova. “In practical terms this means fewer hand-offs, less reconciliation, faster settlement, and clearer status updates end to end.”

This approach also enables more sophisticated payment functionality, such as conditional payments or synchronised foreign exchange settlement, while preserving the relationship between banks and their depositors.

Richard Baker, founder and CEO of Tokenovate, notes that projects like Agorá quickly shift the conversation away from tokenised assets themselves and towards the infrastructure that supports them. “Tokenisation isn’t really about the asset or the payment itself, but about how systems connect, how settlement is coordinated, and where legal finality and risk sit,” he says.

Settlement finality, liquidity and trust

A defining feature of Project Agorá is its reliance on settlement in central bank money — widely regarded as a low-risk settlement asset for wholesale payments when held as central bank reserves. This choice addresses one of the core risks in cross-border payments: uncertainty over when settlement is final.

By anchoring settlement to central bank money, Agorá seeks to reduce counterparty risk and improve confidence in payment finality across jurisdictions. Teresa Cameron, CEO of Clear Junction, describes the project as “a useful signal that banks and central banks are testing tokenised deposits and settlement in central bank money to reduce cross-border settlement friction,” while cautioning that “the hard work is governance, interoperability, operational resilience, and demonstrable controls”.

Liquidity management is another area where Agorá could have long-term implications. Today, banks often pre-position liquidity in multiple markets to manage settlement timing mismatches. A unified ledger capable of near-real-time, atomic settlement could reduce the need for idle liquidity, although participants stress that this remains an area for experimentation rather than assumption.

Governance, regulation and operational reality

Unlike many privately led tokenisation initiatives, Project Agorá places governance and regulatory alignment at the centre of its design. With seven central banks involved, the project is examining how tokenised money can comply with existing legal frameworks around settlement finality, anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (CTF) across multiple jurisdictions.

Gates highlights the importance of this institutional backing. “The key strength lies in the backing of seven central banks and 40 private-sector financial institutions,” she says. “The aim is to establish common standards, supported by state-level rigour and auditing, to ensure that this financial innovation complements broader monetary policy.”

Operational questions remain central to the project’s work. These include how to manage payment-versus-payment (PvP) across currencies, how liquidity and FX risk are handled, and how the platform would operate across time zones on a near-continuous basis.

From a compliance perspective, Agorá is also testing whether shared validation processes could reduce duplication without weakening controls. “Cross-border payments often repeat similar sanctions and AML checks at multiple points in the chain,” Demidova explains. “Agorá is effectively testing whether more of that can be done up front, without breaking privacy rules or national regulatory requirements.”

Infrastructure before innovation

Several contributors stress that tokenisation alone will not resolve longstanding inefficiencies if it is layered onto outdated infrastructure. Steve Cook, co-founder and strategic adviser at Form3, argues that legacy architecture remains a key constraint. “It’s impossible to leverage the benefits of tokenisation for cross-border payments while relying on legacy architecture that simply can’t handle them,” he says. “Tokenisation is not a workaround for legacy systems. Without fixing the foundations, the industry risks running into the same old bottlenecks.”

This theme — that coordinated infrastructure change matters more than isolated innovation — runs throughout Project Agorá. As Baker puts it, “progress in capital markets will depend less on isolated tokenisation projects and more on coordinated changes to core market infrastructure”.

What happens next

Project Agorá moved from design into the prototype-building phase in 2025, with work continuing through 2026. A report capturing lessons learned, technical design choices and identified legal and regulatory gaps is expected in the first half of the year.

Importantly, the BIS Innovation Hub has been clear that Agorá is not a finished platform or a product roadmap. It is an experiment designed to test whether a new form of regulated financial market infrastructure for cross-border payments is feasible.

As Pratiksha Pathak, partner and head of payments at RedCompass, notes, momentum is building, but delivery remains uneven. “Despite strong G20 and CPMI commitments, cross-border payments are still too slow, too costly and too opaque,” she says. “Unified ledgers, tokenisation and settlement in central bank money have the potential to materially improve speed, transparency and liquidity efficiency — but 2026 is pivotal.”

For now, Project Agorá represents a careful, institution-led attempt to modernise one of the most critical — and complex — layers of global finance.

Whether its concepts move beyond experimentation will depend not only on technology, but on governance, coordination and the willingness of institutions to modernise the foundations beneath global payments. ■



From experiment to infrastructure

The UK's cryptoasset regulatory turn

Tahlia Kraefft examines how as the United Kingdom's approach to cryptocurrency regulation shifts from minimal oversight to a comprehensive financial services framework regime, is the regulation a brake on innovation or structure for scale?



UK's cryptoasset turning point

A flurry of legal developments through 2025 and early 2026, has seen the UK tighten its regulatory frameworks for compliance to bring cryptocurrency firms under a comprehensive financial regime. The strengthening of UK cryptocurrency regulatory frameworks marks a definitive turning point for institutional adoption, transitioning digital assets from speculative, niche products into recognised, regulated financial instruments. As the regulation is implemented, asset servicers will play a key role in bridging the gap between traditional finance and digital assets, beyond being custodians, to function as broad compliance, security, and administrative partners.

Regulatory reset

Cryptoassets will be regulated under major legislation to go live on 25 October 2027, as the government asserts the UK's ambitions to be a global hub for digital asset investment, through strengthening consumer protection, and fostering market integrity. The UK has moved to bring crypto activities under the established financial services regulatory perimeter for the first time, aligning crypto with traditional finance rules. The future regulatory regime for cryptoassets will see the instruments fall under the scope of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Cryptoassets) Regulations 2025. The final legislation was laid out before parliament on 15 December last year. A pivotal moment in UK crypto rules development, the framework will replace the existing money laundering regime, intending to overcome gaps in consumer protection and inconsistent oversight.

Under the legislation, the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) will oversee wider conduct, reporting, protection standards and enforcement. Additionally the introduction of the Senior Managers and Certification Regime (SM&CR) for cryptoasset firms, will line the industry up with traditional financial services. Senior managers will need to be FCA-approved with accountability across key areas such as compliance, technology, and operational resilience.

Nick Jones, CEO and founder of Zumo, argues the regulatory frameworks walk a tight rope between driving innovation and safety: "Businesses will now have greater clarity on what it means to operate a cryptoasset business in the UK; consumers will have specific assurances related to how their assets are held, as well as a tangible set of investor protections and the assurance of interfacing with regulated businesses held to the stringent standard of UK financial services.

“There’s already a strong retail investor appetite across the UK, and this hunger will grow as the regulatory regime comes into effect.

“For balance’s sake, we now need business-model-aware implementation support, realistically designed bedding-in provisions, and a clear communication of regulatory expectations to ensure that a full spectrum of cryptoasset businesses can continue to serve the UK market.”

Charlotte Wilson, partner at Mischon de Reyam, comments the regulations provide clear legal boundaries through: “Giving certainty required to invest and innovate whilst allowing consumers strong protections. Robust investor safeguards are seen as prerequisites for building the market confidence necessary to attract institutional capital and mainstream adoption.

“Anti-fraud mechanisms include comprehensive disclosure requirements, market abuse prohibitions, anti-money laundering compliance, and enhanced oversight capabilities that make it easier to detect suspicious activity and hold firms to account.”

The regulator is engaging industry participants in ongoing consultations which set out detailed implementation of the future regulatory regime for cryptoassets, open until 12 February.

Jones praises the consultation proceedings, noting: “It’s fair to say that the UK has benefitted from a more systemic, phased, and predictable consultation process via the FCA’s crypto roadmap compared to the generally more fragmented, enforcement-led approach that we’ve seen in other jurisdictions.

“The clearly mapped timeline of consultation papers plots out the route to arriving at a regulatory regime that takes all stakeholders’ ideas and concerns into account. I believe this will help us to avoid the current issues seen in the US, where Coinbase’s decision to withdraw support for the CLARITY Act sent significant shockwaves through the sector.

“And by legislating to extend existing financial regulation to companies involved in crypto, rather than producing a complicated suite of rules tailored to the industry as seen with the EU’s Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation (MiCA), policymakers are making it clear they believe digital assets can successfully coexist with fiat money in our future financial system. That’s a compelling vote of confidence.”

Jones says he believes policymakers aim for the comprehensive regulatory regime to act as a bedrock for a thriving cryptoasset business ecosystem in the UK: “The industry has been waiting for some time for the UK to make good on its often-stated ‘UK Crypto Hub’ ambition, loudly lobbying for the appropriate regulatory framework to facilitate new avenues of economic growth.

“The main ask has been for operational clarity that will allow cryptoasset business to develop in the UK at scale and so the current direction of travel is extremely encouraging.”

Wilson argues: “The UK framework strikes a careful balance between fostering innovation and ensuring robust consumer protection. By establishing clear regulatory standards whilst maintaining proportionate requirements, it seeks to create the certainty needed to attract responsible innovators and institutional capital, positioning the UK as a trusted jurisdiction where safety and innovation can coexist and thrive.”

Digital assets under financial services regulatory umbrella

Through the future regulatory regime for cryptoassets framework, stablecoins will be regulated in a similar manner to traditional financial instruments, providing legal clarity with the potential to boost institutional confidence and broader use.

Firms operating regulated cryptoasset activities will now require full FCA authorisation with specific crypto permission, including holding regulatory capital and adhering with FCA principles. Activities included under the umbrella of the regulation include: issuing qualifying stablecoins in the United Kingdom, operating cryptoasset trading platforms, dealing in cryptoassets (as principal or agent), arranging cryptoasset transactions, safeguarding, and custody of cryptoassets, and qualifying staking. Clear regulation increases the adoption of crypto products by institutional investors, pension funds, and other heavily regulated entities.

The FCA has loosened restrictions on retail access to cryptocurrency exchange traded notes (ETNs) in October 2025, in response to industry and political pressure. The reversing of the ban that has been in force since January 2021, reflects a maturation of the market. Furthermore, the approval of the Property (Digital Assets etc.) Act — granted Royal asset in December 2025 — will see digital assets to be categorised as a distinct form of personal property under UK law, providing legal assurance for market participants.

Jones, remarks: “With much greater certainty in law thanks to the Property (Digital Assets etc) Act, in regulation, and in serviceable business, to put it simply there has never been a better time for cryptoasset businesses to realise UK opportunities at scale.

“But it’s important to note it’s also the end of an era: of offshore provision, of start-up style business processes, and of unregulated business models. What’s now urgently needed is the UK-compliant infrastructure and the UK routes to market that can accommodate new levels of operating obligations.

“Once that’s in place, responsible providers will thrive while bad actors retreat.”

Wilson notes the framework provides important regulatory infrastructure for the UK establishing its credibility as a global crypto hub, via: “Clear definitions, FCA oversight, and consumer protections that are crucial to attracting institutional participation. Whether this translates into meaningful market leadership depends on timely implementation, addressing remaining gaps, and maintaining proportionality that supports innovation.

“The critical question is whether thorough deliberation yields sufficiently superior rules to offset first-mover disadvantages. Innovators require not just clear rules, but timely clarity—prolonged uncertainty is itself a deterrent.

“The regime’s success depends less on the quality of final rules than on whether those rules arrive soon enough, and prove flexible enough, to compete for the innovation already establishing itself elsewhere.”

Greater demand for asset servicing infrastructure

Against these regulatory changes in the digital asset landscape, the role of asset servicers will shift from being optional to required, with a focus on delivering robust custody and safeguarding of cryptoassets.

The framework brings increased demands for regulated digital asset custody, requiring higher standards for record-keeping, segregation, and reconciliation, as crypto services are aligned with traditional asset servicing expectations. It also opens up opportunities for traditional custodians to expand their operations into digital assets. New disclosure obligations and market abuse frameworks will enhance transparency and orderliness of the market, favourable to service providers.

An increased number of crypto funds and tokenised vehicles will require NAV calculation, pricing, and reporting putting more demand on fund administration.

Valuation obstacles increase pressure for specialised data and controls. While tokenisation generates new servicing models it also creates operational complexity. Asset servicers will operate as bridges connecting blockchain infrastructure and traditional finance systems.

Compliance with frameworking including Know Your Customer (KYC), and anti-money laundering (AML), transaction monitoring, and reporting obligations also push demand on Compliance as a Service (Caas) will also create opportunities for regulatory technology-enabled solutions.

Challenges

There is concern from some industry members who say the strict framework requirements could hamper innovation particularly for stablecoin and decentralised finance (DeFi), including the risk of innovation being pushed to less regulated jurisdictions if the laws become overly restrictive. For smaller digital asset firms they may be met with higher compliance costs and barriers to market entry. There is uncertainty around the developing rules for DeFi and decentralised models. Amongst traditional asset servicers there are operational readiness gaps.

New era

The UK’s cryptocurrency regulatory development represents the end of regulatory ambiguity, marking a clear shift from crypto not sitting adjacent to the financial system but rather fully integrated into it. Alongside the recognition of crypto as personal property and strict custody rules, the framework provides legal certainty and lowers the risk barrier to encourage institutional participation. Asset servicers will take on a larger role in this context, providing key market infrastructure for custody and the safeguarding of cryptoassets. With the framework’s potential to attract institutional capital and keep corrupt actors out, it will also place higher standards on the sector to meet governance and accountability benchmarks.

While the regulation could position the UK well as a global player in the digital finance landscape, this will come down to its implementation. ■

From numbers to relationships

Building trust in global asset services

Asma Kabbaj, assistant manager and accountant at JTC in Luxembourg, reflects on her journey into asset servicing, the importance of client relationships in a complex regulatory environment, and how curiosity, collaboration and trust are shaping her career in one of the world's leading fund centres



Can you give us an insight into your personal journey into the asset services industry? Why did you decide this was the career for you?

My journey into asset services began with a natural interest in finance and accounting, paired with a desire to work with international clients. I recall my early experience at an international bank, where I worked on a report involving 14 countries. It was fascinating to discover how accounting rules and regulations differ around the world and to see Luxembourg's pivotal role in the global financial sector.

Even though it is a small country, Luxembourg is a powerful financial centre, especially in asset management and funds, and that inspired me to pursue this path. I realised this career would allow me to continuously use my skills in a dynamic, client-focused setting, which I find incredibly fulfilling. The trust my managers place in me motivates me to go above and beyond and to keep developing my expertise.

What aspects of your job do you enjoy most?

Serving clients is the most rewarding aspect of my job. Meeting, and often exceeding, their expectations gives me great satisfaction. Building strong, open communication with clients is key in our field and is something I truly enjoy.

I also take immense pride in successfully completing a task and knowing I have contributed to both the client's and JTC's success. The trust I receive from my superiors is another motivating factor, it drives me to excel every day.

Lastly, working with a multicultural, diverse team at JTC is a joy, as I benefit from many different backgrounds and perspectives.

Being fairly new to the industry, how does your experience compare to those who are more established? Are there pros and cons?

As someone early in my career I bring curiosity, adaptability and a fresh perspective, these are definite advantages in a rapidly evolving industry. My more experienced colleagues have a wealth of knowledge and a deep understanding of sector complexities, from which I learn a great deal. Being newer allows me to adapt quickly and introduce innovative ideas, while my senior colleagues provide stability, mentorship and guidance. I also

appreciate that they value my perspective and trust me, which helps me grow faster. Both approaches are important and at JTC, sharing and learning from each other is encouraged.

Have you noticed any misconceptions about the asset servicing industry?

Absolutely. A common misconception is that asset servicing is often just about numbers and routine tasks. In reality, it is a relationship-driven industry that demands strong communication, problem-solving ability and real dedication to clients.

The work is dynamic and offers ongoing opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Is there anything in the industry you would like to see evolve or change?

I would like to see more openness to technological innovation and digital tools, which can further streamline processes and enhance client service.

I also believe it is important to continue promoting diversity and inclusion across the industry. I am proud that JTC is actively working towards this, making our workplace even stronger.

What is the training process for a new employee? Was it beneficial to your role and those now in the same position?

JTC offers a comprehensive, hands-on training process.

It includes practical sessions, mentorship and shadowing experienced colleagues, which helps new team members integrate and contribute quickly. I found this approach extremely valuable, not only did I learn the technical side of my role but I also became familiar with JTC's culture and values.

When training new colleagues, I try to provide the same detailed guidance and show them what makes JTC unique, empowering them to take full advantage of their opportunities here.

It is also great that at JTC you can approach anyone with questions and there are straightforward processes in place to help you learn.

Comments from colleagues

“Asma played a pivotal role in my initial training and integration at JTC, ensuring I was introduced to all the JTC’s processes and workflows. Her helpfulness and support not only guided me through my tasks but also made sure I never felt isolated during my first days.”

Jean Ferreira - Junior Accountant

“She introduced me to team members and included me in JTC’s events, which greatly contributed to my sense of belonging and helped me feel welcome.”

Mehdi Rajoun – Senior Accountant

“Your dedication to both clients and our team really makes a difference. You always go the extra mile and your positive attitude is contagious.”

“Asma’s determination, energetic personality and strong client focus make her an outstanding point of reference for the team. She has a unique ability to create memorable moments that inspire and uplift everyone around her, creating a very pleasant working atmosphere. We are lucky to have her with us.”

Giovanni Incardona – Associate Director

“Asma is someone you can always rely on, always ready to take on new challenges and to support both teams and clients. Whatever she does, she remains very positive and motivated.”

“It is a pleasure to have her on the team, as she contributes greatly to creating a positive work atmosphere and keeping clients happy!”

Fanny Rampont – Senior Manager

In terms of your career, where do you see yourself in a decade?

In 10 years, I hope to have taken on more leadership responsibilities within asset services, driving strategic initiatives and shaping the future direction of our business. I want to continue developing professionally and personally, broadening my expertise and deepening my understanding of the global financial landscape. I am passionate about supporting and mentoring the next generation of talent by helping them navigate the challenges and opportunities of our industry.

Above all, I aspire to play a key role in contributing to JTC’s success and reputation in Luxembourg’s vibrant financial sector, championing innovation, collaboration and excellence every step of the way.

What advice would you give to young graduates entering the financial services field?

Be eager to learn and don’t hesitate to ask questions. Build strong relationships with colleagues and clients, they will be invaluable to your career.

Focus equally on soft and technical skills, as both are essential for success; one without the other is not enough.

Embrace diversity and new perspectives, and most importantly, find an organisation whose values align with yours as I did at JTC. This will make your career both rewarding and enjoyable. ■

Asma Kabbaj
Assistant manager and accountant
JTC





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FIND OUT MORE



Industry Appointments



Crypto Finance Group appoints new CCO

Crypto Finance Group, part of Deutsche Börse Group, has announced the appointment of Mike Schwitalla as its chief commercial officer. He will report directly to the company’s CEO, Stijn Vander Straeten.

The newly created role is said to highlight the company’s focus on growth, client centricity, and international expansion, according to Crypto Finance.

Schwitalla, who has been with the company for over five years, will assume responsibility for product

development, sales, trading, custody and settlement, infrastructure and staking, in addition to marketing and communications.

Commenting on the appointment, Vander Straeten believes that Schwitalla’s “strong track record, entrepreneurial mindset, and clear client focus make him the ideal choice to drive our global expansion”.

Schwitalla shared his excitement about his new role, aiming to help “further strengthen Crypto Finance’s position as a leading regulated provider of digital asset solutions globally”.

BNP Paribas’ Securities Services appoints Herrlin

The Securities Services business of BNP Paribas has appointed Peter Herrlin as global head of Hedge Fund Services. Based in London, Herrlin has been made responsible for the oversight of the Hedge Fund Services Client Line and Client Delivery global teams.

According to the firm he will be leading the Hedge Fund Services’ go-to-market strategy, managing its risk profile and designing its business operating and client experience models.

Herrlin brings over 25 years’ leadership experience from European investment banks. He most recently served as EMEA head of client solutions, banking and markets at Northern Trust, where he led and built the Capital Markets Client Solutions team for the region.

Prior to that, he held various senior roles for hedge fund teams at Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken (SEB) and Danske Bank.

Herrlin will report to Patrick Hayes, global head of Alternatives Investors, Securities Services, and locally to Julien Kasparian, regional head for the UK and Middle East, Securities Services.

FIS chooses Chakravarthy

FIS has selected Anil Chakravarthy to join its board of directors.

His appointment increases the size of the board from nine to ten directors, nine of whom, including Chakravarthy, are independent.

Chakravarthy, currently serves as president of customer experience orchestration business at Adobe, where he is responsible for the

firm's worldwide field operations, including enterprise sales, professional services, and customer success.

He previously worked as CEO of Informatica for five years, leading the company's transformation to cloud and subscription services.

He first joined the company in 2013 as executive vice president and chief product officer in 2013.

He also held leadership roles at Symantec Corporation, including as executive vice president of information security, leading product management for enterprise security services at VeriSign.

Jeffrey Goldstein, independent chairman of the board, comments: "We are pleased to welcome Anil to the FIS board. He is an accomplished technology leader who brings deep expertise in enterprise software, cloud transformation, and AI-powered enterprise solutions.

"His track record of driving AI transformation at scale and his extensive experience in SaaS and data management will be invaluable as FIS continues to advance financial technology innovation and deliver exceptional value to our clients."

Stephanie Ferris, CEO and president of FIS, adds: "Anil's expertise in customer experience orchestration and AI-powered solutions aligns perfectly with FIS' strategic priorities and vision to unlock financial technology across the money lifecycle.

"His proven leadership in transforming global enterprises to cloud and subscription models will provide valuable insights as we continue to innovate and expand our capabilities.

"I look forward to working with him as we execute our strategic vision."



GCEX Group appoints Tan

Regulated digital prime broker GCEX Group has appointed Carmen Tan to lead GCEX MENA as managing director. Based in Dubai, Tan will focus on spearheading growth opportunities for the Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (VARA) and delivering service to institutional clients.

As a fluent Mandarin and Cantonese speaker, Tan's remit extends beyond managing director of the MENA region to also drive market expansion in Asia, says the firm.

GCEX highlights that Tan is a growth strategy expert with experience

from both the crypto and FX industries. She joins from CoinW Exchange in Dubai, where as global strategy and growth manager she systematically scaled each of her own-sourced institutional clients, while managing a team of eight senior institutional sales professionals to accelerate growth across the Middle East, Europe and South East Asia.

Prior to CoinW, Tan spent almost two years at MultiBank Group, latterly as regional marketing and growth lead, based in Dubai, with a focus on expanding the institutional client base across Asia.

Cifu and Schiciano elected to MarketAxess board

MarketAxess Holdings, an operator of an electronic trading platform for fixed-income securities, has elected Douglas Cifu and Kenneth Schiciano to serve on the company's board of directors, effective 1 March 2026. Cifu is a co-founder of Virtu Financial, a global financial technology firm and market maker.

He served as president from the company's founding in 2008 until 2013, and then as CEO from 2013 through July 2025, continuing to advise Virtu through the end of the year.

Before founding Virtu, Cifu was a partner at the international law firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton, and Garrison.

Schiciano has served as a Senior Advisor at TA Associates, a global private equity firm, since July 2022, where he focuses on investments in infrastructure, software and financial technology companies.

Schiciano joined TA Associates in 1989 and has more than 30 years of experience in the private equity industry, with expertise in the communications and financial technology industries.

He previously served as a Managing Director from 2000 to 2022 and formerly served as co-head of TA's North America Technology Group.

Chris Concannon, CEO of MarketAxess, notes: "We are pleased to welcome both Doug and Ken to our Board. Doug brings deep fintech and regulatory expertise from building a major global market maker, and Ken adds more than three decades of financial technology and private equity experience from a leading global investment firm.

"I am confident they will each provide invaluable insight as we continue investing in next-generation trading protocols and data-driven solutions."

Cifu, comments: "I'm honored to join the MarketAxess board and support a company that sits at the forefront of the digital transformation in fixed income trading. MarketAxess has a proven commitment to innovation and implementing advanced technology for the benefit of the market, and I look forward to contributing to its strategic vision."

Schiciano adds: "MarketAxess has been a defining force in the evolution of electronic fixed income markets. I am pleased to join the board at a time when market structure, data, and technology are increasingly central to liquidity and transparency. I look forward to working with the board and management to support the company's long-term growth and innovation."

fundcraft makes new appointments as it opens its first office in France

fundcraft, a European digital-native fund operations platform, has appointed Christian Senitz as chief operating officer and has opened a Paris office, led by Thomas Ibanez, acting as country head, France.

The firm says that these announcements mark a new phase in its execution and scaling strategy, as the company expands beyond its Luxembourg foundation.

The firm's expansion aims at helping asset managers, platforms and distribution-led players operate these models with greater efficiency, transparency and control.

Senitz joins fundcraft to lead group-wide operational execution and scalable growth, including the company's expansion beyond

Luxembourg into additional European fund domiciles, with France as the first step.

He brings more than two decades of senior leadership experience across finance and operations in high-growth technology and financial services companies, including Rocket Internet, where he focused on scaling international operations, building execution discipline and supporting rapid multi-market expansion.

As the chief operating officer, Senitz will focus on industrialising fundcraft's operating platform, strengthening execution excellence at scale, and supporting further geographic expansion, ensuring growth is delivered with institutional rigour and consistency, the firm notes.

Commenting on his appointment, Senitz says: "fundcraft has reached a stage where disciplined execution and scale matter as much as innovation. The opportunity now is to industrialise what we've built and extend it across Europe. I'm looking forward to helping scale this operating model beyond Luxembourg, starting with France."

Additionally, the new country head Ibanez brings extensive experience in the French asset management and fund distribution ecosystem, spanning institutional and wholesale coverage as well as familiarity with regulatory environments, including previous experience at the Autorité des marchés financiers (AMF).

The firm says he will lead local market development, hiring and partnerships, and will support fundcraft's long-term ambition to serve French-domiciled funds and France-linked distribution models, including private markets access strategies and European Long-Term Investment Fund (ELTIF), evergreen structures. ■

ASSET SERVICING TIMES

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Payments
24

Speed vs scrutiny

With payments settling in seconds and operating around the clock, traditional AML and CTF frameworks are being pushed to their limits, forcing institutions to rethink how financial crime controls operate in a real-time environment

Zarah Choudhary reports



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Payments
25

As real-time payments continue to expand across global markets, financial institutions are being forced to confront a growing operational tension: how to deliver speed and certainty while maintaining robust and money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (CTF) controls.

Instant payment rails operate 24/7, settle transactions within seconds and, in many cases, offer no opportunity for recall once funds have moved. While these systems promise significant efficiency gains and improved cash-flow visibility, they also place pressure on AML frameworks that were originally designed for slower, reversible, batch-based payment models.

From batch processing to instant settlement

Real-time payments represent a structural shift in how money moves through the financial system.

Unlike traditional payment methods, which are processed within defined cut-off times and settlement windows, real-time payments are continuous and immediate, enabling funds to be credited almost instantly to the recipient.

For businesses, this immediacy supports improved liquidity management, automated reconciliation and on-demand payments across supply chains, payroll and treasury operations. For financial institutions, however, it also compresses the time available to detect and intervene in potentially suspicious activity.

Historically, AML controls have relied heavily on transaction-level monitoring, with the option for post-transaction intervention. In a real-time environment, operator efficiency.

AML controls move upstream

According to Lloyd Sebastian, vice president for global financial institutions at CFC time payments is fundamentally redefining risk is managed.

"Real-time payments are fundamental CTF risk management by shifting controls." There is a greater need for risk at the account and client level, rather than transaction-level monitoring.

That shift is echoed by Rachel Whelan, APAC & MEA head of corporate cash management and global head of payments & international FX product management at Deutsche Bank, who says the instant nature of real-time payments has placed client experience firmly at the centre of AML design.

"The nature of real-time payments being instant and having an instant experience embedded into their usage drives the priority of ensuring that the client experience is seamless," Whelan says.

"This is where the need for highly automated AML and CTF checks to be embedded into the experience as early as possible in the flow comes into play."

As a result, firms are increasingly shifting towards preventative rather than red-flag checks.

"Moving to preventative rather than red-flag checks is something we are seeing more of," Whelan adds, noting that the speed and irrevocable nature of real-time payments requires real-time detection, supported by the use of AI tools and enriched data to help identify the parties involved in transactions.

This upstream shift is designed to preserve straight-through processing (STP) and avoid reintroducing the friction that historically slowed payments and led up liquidity.

Rather than pausing transactions mid-flow, firms are placing greater emphasis on customer risk scoring, onboarding controls and data accuracy before payments are initiated.

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People Moves
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Industry Appointments



Padbury joins Yealand

Gareth Padbury has been appointed head of operations at Yealand.

In this role, he will be responsible for overseeing the bank's operational strategy, supporting continued business growth and delivering high-quality outcomes for clients.

His career also includes director-level roles at Raytheon Transfer Agency Solutions, as well as senior management positions at Bank of New York Mellon and Northern Trust.

Sage Capital welcomes Krough as Sales Director

Scott Krough has joined Sage Capital Management as a sales director, with responsibility for sales global growth from hedge funds, venture capital, leasing firms, and derivatives.

With over 30 years' experience in the financial markets, the firm says Krough is a seasoned sales, trading and business development professional with deep expertise across T&F, R&I, and digital assets.

He joins Sage Capital Management from Fidelity Capital, where he was international sales director for the last two years, managing a global sales team.

His experience spans global markets, including South America, Opportunities, and Raymond James, across both the fixed income and equity markets, and includes roles at Citigroup, Citicorp, and Citicorp's digital asset team including EXANTE and Sleeds.

The firm adds that his extensive knowledge across multiple asset classes and broad global network of clients, contacts, and counterparties enables him to identify opportunities and deliver tailored solutions in rapidly evolving market environments.

J.P. Morgan selects Moon

Arnie Moon has been named J.P. Morgan's head of Securities Services for the Nordics, a newly created role.

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PREPARING FOR 2026

From integration and data integrity to automation, resilience, and tokenisation, Broadridge's Tom Burke looks at this year's priorities



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