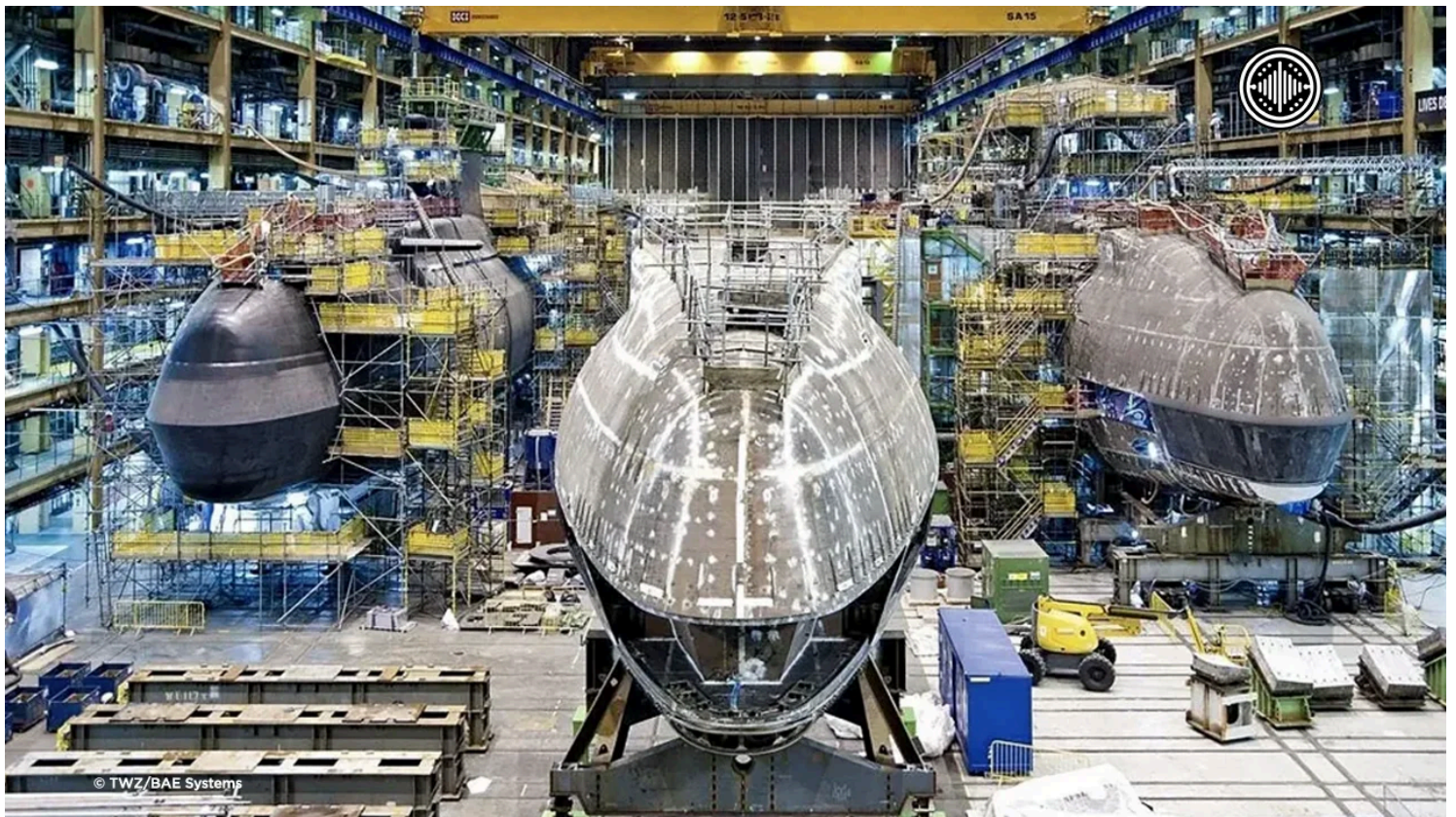


## Barrow's Shipbuilding Surge Signals Economic Revival

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In Barrow-in-Furness, the thunderous rhythm of industry echoes once again as HMS Agamemnon, the sixth of seven Astute-class submarines ordered in 2001, nears completion in the town's historic shipyard. In times past, such a milestone might have heralded lean years, with the yard facing the spectre of dwindling contracts. Today, however, Barrow's fortunes have turned, with a brimming order book promising decades of prosperity for this Cumbrian coastal town.

The shipyard, owned by BAE Systems, is riding a wave of demand driven by heightened global tensions and the Royal Navy's pressing need for advanced naval assets. The Dreadnought programme, intended to replace the ageing Vanguard-class submarines carrying Britain's Trident nuclear deterrent, has been confirmed to include four vessels and a fifth option. In addition, the UK plans to build up to 12 SSN-AUKUS nuclear-powered attack submarines under the AUKUS partnership, ensuring a sustained workload at Barrow-in-Furness. This influx of contracts has prompted BAE to expand its Barrow workforce from 11,000 to 17,000, matching the yard's historic peak, while its apprenticeship programme is set to nearly triple to 1,000 trainees.

Significant investment is transforming the region. A £220 million infrastructure package, greenlit under the previous Conservative government, is upgrading the A595, Barrow's vital link to the M6, easing transport woes and boosting connectivity. The town's population, static for nearly four decades, has begun to grow, now standing at 67,000. New residents are drawn not only by jobs but by the allure of Cumbria's rugged coastline and proximity to the Lake District's natural splendour.

Jim Perks, a former submarine captain leading BAE's training efforts at the £25 million Submarine Academy for Skills and Knowledge, opened in 2018, underscores the scale of this transformation. "The demand for submarines has been clear for years," Perks said in a recent interview. "We've had to scale up our workforce, expand the yard, and strengthen the supply chain." To meet this challenge, BAE has adopted a "grow your own" strategy, with the academy expanding into a high-tech training hub in a former Debenhams store, closed in 2021. This hub equips apprentices with cutting-edge simulators, ensuring they are job-ready before stepping onto the shipyard floor. In 2024, the academy attracted 4,000 applicants, rising to 6,000 this year, with a 60:40 split between trade and degree apprentices.

The shipyard's growth is breathing life into Barrow's economy. Local trader Ashley Holroyd, 33, owner of Coffee D'Ash, exemplifies this revival. Having started with a trailer in 2017 when the town centre was struggling, Holroyd opened a permanent shop last year near the training hub, now employing eight staff. "Back then, shops were shuttering, and the high street felt deserted," he said. "Now, with the town centre spruced up, it's a place on the rise." Young apprentices like Carrie, 20, a trainee electrician, and Olivia, 19, training to be a joiner, echo this sentiment. "It's a hands-on job, and I'm proud to carry on my family's tradition,"

Carrie said. Olivia added, “The yard’s growth is a lifeline for young people here, offering job security and a solid start.”

BAE’s investment extends beyond Barrow. In Glasgow, the company is constructing eight Type 26 destroyers for the Royal Navy, backed by a £12 million academy, opened by Princess Anne in April, training 300 recruits annually. Vice-Admiral Sir Simon Lister, managing director of BAE’s Navy Ships business, recently highlighted the urgency of this work, citing Russia’s growing threat. “In my 48 years in the Armed Forces and defence industry, this is the most tense period I’ve seen,” he said. To meet demand, BAE has invested £300 million in Glasgow’s facilities, including a vast shipbuilding hall that allows two warships to be built simultaneously, slashing construction time by a third.

At the Glasgow Academy, apprentices like Anna, 30, carry forward a proud legacy. “Almost every male in my family worked in the yards or served at sea,” she said. “I’m honoured to follow in their footsteps.” Barrow and Glasgow stand as twin pillars of Britain’s naval resurgence, driven by necessity and ambition. Yet, while the current Labour government has spotlighted Barrow’s success, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer calling it a “blueprint for the nation” during a visit with Defence Secretary John Healey, the foundations of this revival were laid by prior administrations. For Barrow, the future is bright, with its shipyard not just building submarines but anchoring a community’s renewed sense of purpose.