

BCC: Government must establish permanent dialogue with business on future trade deals

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is today (Wednesday) intensifying its call for the UK Government to establish a formal, permanent dialogue with business, consumer and civil society organisations to ensure that trade negotiations – including those on Brexit – draw on the detailed knowledge, expertise and experience of the private and third sector.

The leading business group has written to international trade secretary Dr Liam Fox to urge his Department to swiftly establish formal structures for engagement on trade – which are needed to ensure that real-world business issues and concerns are appropriately tackled by civil servants as they negotiate trade agreements on the UK's behalf.

With less than a year to go before the UK formally leaves the European Union, the BCC's call for the government to establish formal ways for business and civil society to engage with trade negotiations is supported by new research from the business group and the London School of Economics (LSE), which recommends that the UK swiftly adopt six practices that successful trading powers around the world use to ensure trade negotiations deliver for their country's economic and consumer interests:

- **Establish a formal process for engaging with stakeholders**, including the creation of a set of minimum standards on a statutory footing with formal guidelines
- **Introduce a formal and flexible committee structure**, to ensure targeted engagement of stakeholders throughout all stages of negotiations
- **Enhance civil society dialogues**, encompassing a range of sectors and regions
- **Enable the structured use of online consultations**, to provide a basis for constructive dialogue in the UK for civil society at large
- **Adapt and implementing the 'room-next-door' mechanism in negotiations**, allowing stakeholders to sit in an adjacent room to negotiations, providing immediate feedback and expertise, and
- **Ensure transparency through reports and enforcement**, to provide stakeholders with information at all stages of the policy process

Speaking while on a business visit to Beijing, Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

"The world's most successful trading countries have formal structures to tap

into business expertise ahead of and during major trade negotiations. As the UK prepares to develop its own independent trade policy after its departure from the European Union, the government must learn from global best practice – and swiftly establish a detailed, meaningful and permanent dialogue with business and civil society that informs and supports future UK trade deals.

“This is imperative, as the government needs business expertise, insight and support both to ‘roll over’ existing EU free trade agreements, which must happen for UK businesses to maintain current levels of market access, and as we enter into discussions with new markets around the world in future.

“Without a permanent and deep dialogue between business and government on the practical details of trade across borders, UK negotiators may lack crucial insights – forcing them to muddle through rather than deliver the best possible deals for the UK’s exporting and importing interests.”

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Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

The BCC has launched a campaign aimed at eradicating not-spots for mobile voice coverage. Add your not-spot [here](#).

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