

Digital trade key to unlocking opportunities of the future

A new report published today (26 November) by the Board of Trade – Digital Trade – outlines the huge opportunities digital trade presents for boosting UK exports, turbocharging economic growth, and creating high-paying jobs across all parts of the UK.

From purchasing items online to streaming music, digital trade is something that everyone depends on and is therefore vital for business growth across the UK. The UK exported over £200bn worth of digitally delivered services in 2019 and this is set to increase, with investment in global digital transformation rising worldwide following the pandemic.

The new report will be launched by Anne-Marie Trevelyan at the Board of Trade meeting today as part of a two-day visit to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has over 100 cyber security firms, employing approximately 2,300 people, and the International Trade Secretary will meet a host of digital and data businesses who export their products globally.

The Government is negotiating ground-breaking digital provisions in new trade deals and leading on tackling protectionism in online trade internationally, to the benefit of UK businesses and consumers. Advancing digital trade could also help to boost wages, with employees in the digital sector earning around 50% more than the UK average.

With the expansion of DIT's Export Academy and the launch of Trade and Investment Northern Ireland, the International Trade Secretary will encourage businesses to take advantage of this support in a bid to further unlock Northern Ireland's exporting potential.

Secretary of State for International Trade, Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, said:

Digital trade presents huge opportunities for our brilliant UK businesses, that's why we're building a global network of next-generation trade deals that drive productivity and boost high-paying jobs and growth in all parts of the UK.

By addressing digital protectionism on the global stage and championing a free, open, and competitive digital economy, more UK companies will be able to export their innovative, high-quality services and goods globally.

This report builds on the game-changing digital agreement that the International Trade Secretary negotiated between the G7 countries last month, and encourages the UK to take further action to tackle digital protectionism

and discrimination on the global stage.

The UK is using its free trade agenda to boost digital trade; negotiating modern free trade agreements (FTAs) that include comprehensive digital provisions like those agreed with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, and digital-focused agreements like the Singapore Digital Economy Agreement.

This report recommends that the UK leverages its trade agenda to be at the forefront of the digital revolution by:

- Focusing its digital trade policy around five goals: open digital markets; free and trusted data flows; consumer and business safeguards; digital trading systems; and partnerships to shape global rules, norms, and standards.
- Concluding accession to CPTPP and building a pipeline of modern digital FTAs.
- Pursuing a ground-breaking Digital Economy Agreement with Singapore.
- Pushing for substantial progress in ongoing WTO e-commerce negotiations.
- Using its G7 Presidency, and membership of the G20, OECD, and WTO, to advocate for an open, inclusive digital economy. *Continuing to promote UK exports globally and showcase the UK as a strong and competitive place to invest and do digital business.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis MP, said:

Digital technology is the future, and in Northern Ireland we have one of the best digital infrastructures in the UK.

As the Board of Trade gets ready to be hosted here, it is exciting to see how businesses in Northern Ireland are building a global network for trade and commerce.

With over 100 cyber security firms in Northern Ireland, employing approximately 2,300 people, the cybersecurity and fintech sectors are thriving. We will continue to capitalize on this momentum and build our global reputation.

Board of Trade Adviser and Economist, Dr Linda Yueh, said:

By playing a global role in helping to ensure that digital trade is fair as well as free, the UK can do a lot in this area for its economy and its people to make the most of this fast-growing aspect of the 21st century world economy.

techUK CEO, Julian David, said:

Digital trade has taken centre stage in the UK Government's trade strategy after Brexit. techUK is a longstanding advocate for, and supporter of, a UK strategy that combines advanced digital trade provisions in bilateral trade agreements with international regulatory cooperation.

Today's Board of Trade report outlines the right priorities for the UK to continue to advance its leadership, both in new bilateral agreements, like the Digital Economy Agreement with Singapore, and in multilateral forums, at the G7 and the WTO. We support the vision outlined in this report that allows the world-leading UK tech sector to scale up and offer their services to customers across the world and we will continue to work closely with the government to deliver on those promises.

Lord Mayor of the City of London and Board of Trade Adviser, Vincent Keaveny, said:

The free and trusted flow of data between various jurisdictions is vital for UK financial and professional services.

Restrictions on data flows and localisation requirements lead to increased operational costs for firms and less choice for consumers.

The UK should seek to develop the technical and regulatory security mechanisms which can reduce and remove these barriers. Free and trusted data flows must be a priority for our digital trade policy.