



# BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE TRADE MANIFESTO 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

**The British Chambers of Commerce oversees a dynamic Network of 53 accredited UK Chambers with affiliates in over 75 international markets committed to creating a platform for businesses to shape the economy for the better.**

We firmly believe that international trade can make every company a better one.

With more than 160 years of experience in the world of trade we know that once you open the door to overseas exports, then the possibilities for expansion are endless.

That's why we want to build a business community in the United Kingdom where more than half of firms export.

Our Chamber Network already does that, and we want to help thousands more do it too.

In 2022, there was a continued expansion in UK services exports across the world – cementing our place as the globe's second largest exporter of services. That needs to grow further. Now we need our goods exports to experience greater growth in the coming years.

## CHAMBER NETWORK TRADE IN NUMBERS

Approx.

**£16bn**

OF UK TRADE

Over

**500,000**

CERTIFICATES ISSUED

Supporting

**30,000**

FIRMS

Almost

**200**

EXPORT MARKETS

**500**

HOURS OF FREE  
GUIDANCE DELIVERED  
EVERY WEEK

**99.9%**

RIGHT FIRST TIME

**ONE**

GLOBALLY  
RESPECTED BRAND

**350**

QUALIFIED  
SPECIALISTS

**100**

YEARS OF  
GLOBAL TRADE

## WHY IS EXPORTING SO IMPORTANT?

**We are constantly asking questions of the thousands of businesses in our Chamber Network to find out what's happening in the world of trade. The evidence is clear; internationally active firms are more productive and resilient.**

Our research, undertaken throughout the pandemic, showed that these businesses, while significantly impacted, were still more likely to report increased investment and cash flow.

In 2018, our Innovation and Productivity Survey also highlighted how firms trading overseas were more likely to have undertaken innovative activities, such as the introduction of new products, services, or production methods, than firms which didn't.

As we move closer to the second half of this decade and the UK's trading relationships around the world change, we understand that businesses will need greater support, information and incentives to adapt, identify opportunities to increase trade, and attract investment.

The world of trade is in constant flux, fresh markets are emerging, the digitalisation of trade documents is accelerating, and more sustainable goods and services are being developed. We have an opportunity to be in the vanguard of this new wave of commerce for years to come.



Over

60%

**BCC CHAMBER  
MEMBERS EXPORT**

## THE BCC's ROLE IN GLOBAL TRADE

**When we were first set up in 1860, our aim was to help companies grow by trading overseas, and that hasn't changed. Our organisation and our Network have always been about making other businesses a success.**

International trade has always been important to the UK economy, but we believe it is essential to help businesses fully recover from the impact of the pandemic.

And our Network of 53 Chambers of Commerce, across the UK, knows all about the nuts and bolts of what needs to be done to set a business on the road to successful overseas trade.

Each Chamber understands its local economy inside out. It can provide the advice, training, support and all the encouragement needed by any firm which is new to the world of exporting.

We also have an expert brokerage business, ChamberCustoms, that can provide training and advice as well. It has been built on our years of experience, and the knowledge and success of our trade facilitation activities to date. It isn't a coincidence that 60% of BCC Chamber members export compared to just 10% of firms across the UK.

ChamberCustoms' aim is to help businesses expand and diversify the number of exports from the UK across the world.

Its expertise means it can save businesses large chunks of time and resources by dealing with their customs declarations: simplifying the process, filing the forms and covering all additional paperwork.

It is also able to provide training for firms that want to do this work in-house, giving traders the knowledge they need to consistently and accurately account for border clearances and make sure they pay only what they should.

But if businesses are simply after advice on what to do, then it can provide that too. ChamberCustoms has industry experts, with decades of experience, able to provide bespoke advisory services for each individual business's unique challenges.

And our Network is not just about the help we can give you assistance in the United Kingdom. It's about the help we can offer in more than 75 different markets around the world. Over the past few years, we have steadily expanded our global Network of international member Chambers. They are there to connect businesses in the UK to their country's market - whether it's for exports, imports, or investment.

Our aim is to use this unique global reach, alongside our wider strategic alliances, such as the International Chambers of Commerce (ICC) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This allows us to offer UK firms the best possible opportunities to start, or to continue, growing their business overseas.

# 283,600

GB BUSINESSES WHICH  
EXPORTED IN 2021 - SOME 11.4%

## OUR COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL TRADE

**While it's businesses that actually trade, there is no getting away from the huge role played by governments and global institutions in the international trade system. That's why we have strong policy expertise and connections with these.**

We know that by continually developing the knowledge and expertise within our Network, we can remain effective in influencing policy.

We are a reliable partner to the UK government when it seeks advice on developing trade policy and reaching, implementing and monitoring international agreements.

But this goes wider than just the BCC; we need to build a proper coalition of support around a strong UK trade and investment strategy. We need to develop shared ambitions and goals across the full network of public and private sector organisations that have a stake in our trading future. And we need to help the UK government improve market access for UK companies - to open up new opportunities on digital trade, green growth, e-commerce and services for UK exporters, both large and small.



# 51%

**OF EXPORTS ARE NOW  
PROCESSED DIGITALLY**

## DIGITALISING TRADE

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently established that, as early as 2018, 24% of global trade was already digital. For the UK, it estimated that 51% of exports are now processed digitally - putting us in the top three countries in the world on that measure. Several developments are now happening which could further accelerate digital trade and boost exports.

1

### **Digitalising trade documentation.**

The Electronic Trade Documents Bill, shortly to become law, creates huge potential to make exports more accessible to firms. Bills of Lading, Bills of Exchange, and other key documents which make global trade function, will be legally accepted in electronic form for the first time in the UK. If this trend expands globally, we could see a huge expansion of our export horizons. That's why we are advocating for greater adoption of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) rules on digital trade, and support the government in seeking bilateral and plurilateral agreements to boost it.

2

### **Digitalising border processes and interfaces.**

The UK is planning to roll out its new Single Trade Window from autumn 2024 (for safety and security certificates to begin with) as part of its Border 2025 strategy to ease goods movements in and out of the UK. The EU has also announced its most ambitious customs reforms in decades, and a new Single Customs Window will be launched. Similar initiatives are happening across the world.

3

### **Trade agreements are addressing digital trade issues to promote export growth.**

The UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement, and chapters within other UK trade agreements, are raising the bar on what can be done on data flows and security of payments. These are the lifeblood of easier global digital trade. Further progress could be made among like-minded countries. This could be done on a multilateral basis at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) - for example, by reaching successful outcomes on e-commerce discussions - or by plurilateral means.

4

### **More and more services are being provided by digital means, so should be free of customs duties.**

Three-quarters of the UK's services exports are delivered digitally. The moratorium among WTO member countries on customs duties on electronic transmission of products should be made permanent to underpin this.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Here are our recommendations on how the UK should grow digital trade in the coming years:

- Set and achieve a target of 60% of UK exports being digital by the end of the decade.
- Enhance digital trade provisions with key export markets, making more agreements on the UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (DEA) model with existing trading partners. And ensure there are ambitious chapters in new or upgraded trade agreements with preferential trading partners (eg. Switzerland).
- Assemble a coalition of likeminded partners at the WTO to reach a mutually beneficial agreement on e-commerce. Progress was reported in January 2023 by the co-chairs of the Joint Initiative on e-commerce at the WTO: Australia, Japan and Singapore. We now need to reach tangible outcomes to boost e-commerce trade in goods.
- Make the ban on customs duties on e-transmission of services permanent, starting with a further extension at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in 2024.
- Be at the forefront of plurilateral efforts at the WTO to oppose data localisation requirements and champion freer digital trade arrangements across the globe.
- Form a cross-cutting digital trade team across the UK government (working with business, devolved administrations and other stakeholders) to expand market access and ensure the strongest possible implementation by businesses of new digital trade terms.
- Ensure that the new Single Trade Window is as inter-operable as possible on trade document digitalisation with other emerging systems, like the EU's proposed Single Customs Window. Improve customs regulatory and practical engagement with the EU and other key trading partners.
- Encourage more countries to adopt rules on trade document digitalisation in the form of the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records, through institutions such as the ICC (with its Uniform Rules on Digital Trade) and the World Customs Organisation.

# 5%

## WTO FORECAST OF GROWTH IN GLOBAL EXPORTS IN ENERGY RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL GOODS BY 2030 IF TARIFFS AND BARRIERS TO TRADE ARE REMOVED OR REDUCED

### TRADE, CLIMATE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The transition to Net Zero and the commitments undertaken by both developed and developing countries at the Paris and Glasgow COPs create great opportunities for UK exporters. The focus must be on the technologies to support this transition, and the services which underpin them. The WTO's World Trade Report last autumn emphasised the potential benefits of trade liberalisation in this area – by eliminating tariffs and addressing non-tariff barriers to green trade, exports in this sector could rise markedly by 2030, expanding global access and growth (by as much as 0.8% of global GDP), and providing a further reduction in global carbon emissions (by 0.58% by 2030). Bilateral trade agreements between countries are helping to promote this agenda, but further impetus could be delivered at plurilateral level through the WTO Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD).

Alongside this agenda are emerging bilateral and plurilateral initiatives on the greening of supply chains, and dealing with the effects of carbon leakage, both before and after the outbreak of war in Ukraine last February. The US and EU are in advanced discussions on the launch of a Global Sustainable Steel and Aluminium Arrangement as soon as late 2023, which other countries may be able to join, to

reduce the carbon footprint of steel imports from markets which embed high levels of carbon in their production. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) comes into operation in October 2023 in terms of reporting requirements on imported goods produced outside the EU Single Market, and from 2026 on the key trading provisions within the scheme. The UK government has recently consulted on similar policies to tackle carbon leakage, including the introduction of a potential UK CBAM later this decade.

Moreover, investment in green technologies has become of great significance in global industrial and economic policies. The US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is providing up to \$369bn in subsidies and tax credits for production of turbines, electric vehicles, and other climate-friendly technologies in the US and connected supply chains under its trade agreements. The EU has adopted a Green Deal as part of its industrial strategy, and further measures may be undertaken at EU and member state level to permit subsidies in key sectors like electric battery and vehicle production.

Taken together, these emerging developments present challenges as well as opportunities on green trade, decarbonising supply chains, and on future investment and subsidies policies.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Here are our recommendations to the UK government on a comprehensive green trade strategy:

- ✓ Scale up green exports as a strategic driver of attaining the £1tn exports target in the next decade.
- ✓ Achieve stronger integration in Whitehall between industrial, trade, subsidies and export finance policies affecting trade in green goods and services.
- ✓ Revise regulatory and subsidies frameworks on key green trade sectors, such as electric vehicles and batteries, wind turbines, heat pumps and green hydrogen.
- ✓ Consider targeted tax credits for key elements in critical green supply chains for the UK economy, such as electric vehicle battery production.
- ✓ Earmark additional dedicated finance from UK Export Finance's existing credit lines, to boost exporters access to markets for climate friendly technologies and associated services.
- ✓ Update the Export Strategy with specific support and promotion plans for green exporters.
- ✓ Build stronger plurilateral and multilateral coalitions through, for example, the TESSD at the WTO, to seek to lower tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in green technologies across the world.
- ✓ Examine case for upgrading existing free trade or economic partnership agreements and opening new negotiations to enhance market access and investment opportunities where greater availability of green technologies is needed, for example in the African, South American and Indo-Pacific regions.
- ✓ Promote lower-carbon supply chains in steel and iron globally and engage with the EU, the US and other like-minded states on the institutional and policy arrangements to secure this.
- ✓ Adopt a UK Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism covering all goods within the scope of the Emission Trade Scheme, alongside suitable adjustment periods, and consider formal linkages with EU CBAM/ETS to avoid creation of new trade frictions with our largest trading partner.





# 77%

**BY 2035, SERVICE SECTORS ARE EXPECTED TO ACCOUNT FOR THIS PROPORTION OF GLOBAL GDP**

## A TRADE PLAN FOR THE NEXT DECADE

**Alongside our specific recommendations on digital and green trade, here are the other key asks we think should be at the top of the UK government's list when it comes to global trade and supply chains:**

- To reach the target of £1tn in exports early in the next decade, align industrial and export support strategies particularly with fast growing sectors of our export profile such as services, high-value manufacturing, industrial and construction products, as well as food and drink.
- Refresh the Exports Strategy and re-examine the case for local control and delivery in England of export support, promotion, skills and advocacy services to level up export growth across the country.
- Create an Exports Council bringing together key stakeholders with government and UK Export Finance to regularly report upon and devise policy on export performance and strategy.
- Develop a comprehensive Imports and Supply Chain strategy with business, considering the impacts upon competitiveness and growth, and the role of imports in manufacturing supply chains (including manufacturing for export). Conduct a full analysis and consultation on where sectoral supply chains may benefit from onboarding, near-shoring, or greater diversification, recognising a one-size fits all approach will not be the answer.
- Bring down the costs of exporting goods and services to some of the UK's most significant markets in Asia, Europe, the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and the Americas through effective customs and regulatory co-operation between governments and regulatory bodies.
- Building upon the success of the plurilateral Domestic Regulation in Services deal struck by over 70 countries in Geneva, expand market access in areas around digital trade, services, and technical barriers to trade (TBT) in new free trade agreements the UK is negotiating and in multi-party international agreements where appropriate.
- Generate new opportunities for cross-border data flows, labour mobility, business travel, the delivery of UK professional services overseas and mutual recognition of professional qualifications so that companies can operate in a range of countries.
- Ensure businesses are deriving the maximum value and usage of trade preferences from UK trade agreements through close engagement of the work of the new Preference Utilisation Unit in DBT with that of stakeholders like the BCC.
- Seek stronger customs policy engagement with key markets like the EU and US, particularly over Single Window approaches and potential inter-operabilities, and deepen UK influence in the World Customs Organisation.
- Make the most of opportunities presented by the transition to net zero in trade discussions and set policies and rules on trade and sustainability that support the future exports of environmental goods and services which will follow.
- Secure real benefits for importers and manufacturers in the UK from tariff reductions and the most modern rules of origin in new and upgraded UK trade deals. In terms of the European neighbourhood, the UK should propose rejoining the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean (PEM) Convention to offer greater cumulation in rules of origin for manufacturers.

- Create the best opportunities for foreign direct investment across the nations and regions of the United Kingdom from new trade agreements, multilateral agreements and strong co-operation between business, government, and existing and new investors.
- Encourage the Trade Remedies Authority and UK Government to engage with and take submissions from our Network on trade remedies policy. This would increase the range of economic data informing decisions on trade remedies that impact manufacturing supply chains.
- Fully engage with, and drive forward, the coalition-building work of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other international organisations like the World Customs Organisation (WCO). A rules based global trade system is a vital framework for business certainty over the coming decades. The WTO needs a strong Appellate Body to underpin this rules-based order and continue pushing for multilateral or plurilateral agreements on e-commerce and subsidies.
- Complete, ratify and implement new bilateral trade and investment agreements in our overall economic interests such as deep agreements with India, Switzerland, Canada, Mexico, the Gulf Co-operation Council states, and Israel, and secure necessary upgrades on rules of origin and digital trade in the agreement with South Korea. Ensure that UK business is consulted comprehensively throughout the negotiations and implementation processes on key chapters.
- Consider the case for a further set of trade agreements for negotiation in the latter half of the decade; either upgrades on green and digital trade with existing trading partners, or wholly new agreements in other cases. Particular attention should be paid to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries who are not Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) states, such as Thailand and Indonesia.
- Establish UK-US Trade and Economic Council to formalise engagement on green trade, growth, new technologies, digital trade, supply chains, regulatory co-operation and decarbonisation, and create new pathways for business to engage in each of these workstreams as provided for in the Atlantic Declaration.
- Develop the role of the Chamber Network in being a trusted delivery partner in trade facilitation and digitalisation of trade documentation.







# £340BN

AMOUNT OF GOODS AND SERVICES  
EXPORTED BY UK TO THE EU IN 2022

## STRENGTHENING OUR TRADE AND ECONOMIC LINKS WITH THE EU

**There is no getting away from the fact that trade with the EU is no longer as straightforward as it once was. The UK's exit from the EU Single Market, customs unit and common VAT area means that exporting to the EU takes longer, and requires much more administration and cost.**

Every survey we've carried out since the end of the transition period has seen high numbers of businesses reporting reduced sales to the EU in manufactured goods. In our 2022 Trade survey, 77% of businesses felt the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) was not contributing to their business growth, and 56% said they had experienced difficulty in making the new trading arrangements work for their sales and export strategies.

The good news is that we have a whole range of advisors and experts in the Chamber Network and our ChamberCustoms teams that are helping firms get to grips with the changes that have taken place. As 42% of our goods and services exports still go to the EU, we must not let this wither on the vine.

There are some positive signs as the number of companies exporting is increasing, but this growth is being off-set by a reduced volume of overall trade.

The Windsor Framework has shown that the UK and EU can sit down and work out compromises. With these improved UK-EU relations, closer co-operation should be possible - through the partnership bodies with the EU - to look at how the TCA is working in practice and can be improved. This can be done even prior to the scheduled 2025/26 review of its operation.

Steps can then be taken to find ways to make it work better still. Here are the key areas where the UK and the EU should focus - grouped into three categories:

**Short-term issues** which the UK government and the European Commission could resolve over the next twelve months, through the Trade Partnership Committee and the sectoral trade committees, under the TCA, which have now started to meet;

**More medium-term issues**, which could be addressed by side agreements to the TCA as part of the initial review of the operation of the Agreement in 2025/26; and

**Longer-term issues**, which may require a more substantial review of the TCA.



## Short Term

- Engagement between the UK government and the European Commission (and in the future also the proposed European Customs Agency) to develop simpler guidance on customs, rules of origin and other key issues, ensuring it is consistently applied across all 27 EU member states and in the UK. Joint guidance should be produced which is clear, practical, and accessible for business in both the EU and UK.
- Reach an agreement on VAT cooperation with the EU to reduce the number of UK companies requiring a fiscal intermediary in the EU to conduct cross-border trade – as exists for companies in Norway trading with the EU.
- Introduce a range of short-term visas for work purposes for up to two years in duration, and broaden the reach of the shortage occupations list, to deal with the current challenges of labour and skills shortages in many sectors of the UK economy.
- Focus on making agreements with individual EU member states as appropriate, on mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
- Ensure the trusted trader arrangements, introduced from 2024 for inbound GB border controls of goods, are as open and usable as possible by small, medium and larger-sized importers and their suppliers, to keep compliance burdens on animal and plant product controls light touch.
- Reflect the realities of modern manufacturing supply chains by not prohibiting CE-marked goods or components from circulating in GB after the end of 2024. Maintain the current position until at least the end of 2026, pending discussions to make usage of CE marking in the UK permanent.
- Engage comprehensively with businesses in GB and NI on implementation of the Windsor Framework, to ensure stability in NI and for the overall UK-EU trading relationship.
- Extend the period in which the currently applicable conditions of the rules of origin on electric vehicles and sourcing of batteries or battery components operate until 2027.

## Medium Term

- Negotiate a veterinary or animal origin and plant product agreement with the EU, either to reduce the complexity of, or to eliminate, the need for Export Health Certificates on agri-food imports and exports.
- Negotiate a supplementary mutual recognition agreement on conformity assessment and markings of industrial, electrical and electronic goods.
- Deliver further flexibility on travel for business purposes and the range of business activities which can be undertaken.
- Make agreements with the European Commission and – where appropriate – bilaterally with member states, on widening access for labour mobility across key sectors of the economy and reaching agreements on mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
- Develop a closer regulatory policy relationship to ensure better co-ordination between the EU and UK, so that businesses do not face new trade barriers through passive regulatory divergence - without appropriate scrutiny and the ability to have their voices heard.





### Longer-term issues:

- Consider the balance between reservations and market access for services and economic priorities for both sides in a global context, where services exports provide the greatest boost to growth.
- Deepen VAT cooperation and adopt common regulatory approaches. Facilitate e-commerce and greater cross-border trade in goods, by cutting cross-border VAT red tape. Produce a cost benefit analysis on a cross-EU-UK framework for VAT on traded goods.
- Consider the scope of the product-specific rules of origin and cumulation, including whether off-the-shelf options, such as the UK re-joining the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean (PEM) Convention, could provide additional flexibility in the absence of more bespoke arrangements.
- Look afresh at whether adjustments to certain product-specific rules of origin would be of mutual benefit to both the UK and the EU, for example in the electric vehicle industry and pan-European supply and sourcing chains.
- Deepen provisions on digital trade and facilitate trade in green goods and services, to ensure these can be traded in both directions at lower cost and with fewer barriers on market access.
- Broaden the categories for cross-border labour mobility and increase the qualifying days in each six-month period. Consider the case for a broad-based reciprocal youth mobility and exchange scheme between the UK and EU, for example like that agreed between the UK with Australia and New Zealand.
- Develop deeper regulatory cooperation on conformity assessment, chemicals and technical barriers to trade. Where strong economic and business arguments exist then trade volumes can be increased, and regulatory compliance costs lowered.
- Develop policies for more efficient trade facilitation, including whether agreements and waivers can be reached to dispense with safety and security certificates on goods movements.
- If not already resolved, reach solutions on lowering costs of agri-food imports and exports by simplification, digitalisation and elimination of export health certificates (EHCs).
- Consider the convincing case for the UK re-acceding to the Lugano Convention to allow businesses certainty on enforcement of civil and commercial judgements in the UK and the EU.



# 3.2%

**WTO'S FORECAST FOR RISE IN GLOBAL  
MERCHANDISE TRADE VOLUMES FOR 2024**

## ENTERING GLOBAL MARKETS

**We have always been champions of international trade; there is no doubt in our minds that businesses that embrace exporting to overseas markets will be better off for it. But the combined impacts of dampened global growth and altered trading terms with the EU mean the challenges in exporting are the most significant in decades.**

Yet we believe that businesses in the UK have the drive, the resilience, the adaptability and the ingenuity to take this challenge and turn it to our advantage.

The business that sees a gap opening in the market, the firm that invents a new energy-saving technology, the start-up that develops a service to help other companies become greener and more sustainable; they will all prosper in a world of international trade.

All it takes is the willingness to try. The BCC Chamber Network and ChamberCustoms have all the expertise needed to then guide them through the steps they need to take.

And with our direct connections to more than 75 markets around the world, we can make it all that bit easier to happen.



# TAKING THE PLUNGE

**We have always been champions of international trade and there is no doubt in our minds that businesses that embrace exporting to overseas markets will be better off for it. But the combined impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit mean the challenges in exporting are the most significant in decades.**

Yet we believe that the businesspeople of the UK have the drive, the resilience, the adaptability and the ingenuity to take this challenge and turn it to their advantage.

The business that sees a gap opening in the market, the firm that invents a new energy-saving technology, the start-up that develops a service to help other companies become greener and more sustainable, they will all prosper in a world of international trade.

**All it takes is the willingness to try; the BCC Chamber Network and ChamberCustoms have all the expertise needed to then guide them through the steps they need to take.**

**And with our direct connections to more than 75 markets around the world, we also have the ability to make it all that bit easier to happen.**

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## WE CAN HELP

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