



# Industry Forum August Newsletter

## Strange things are happening

Even though many of us are holidaying, it is hard to ignore the strange things happening in geopolitics and international trade relations. No one knows the likely outcomes of President Trump's tariff policies, his interventions in the Gaza and Ukraine crises, and his war on some of the top US universities. It is, however, clear that vital, long term sourcing and manufacturing strategies for many countries and companies have been and will be disrupted for some time to come. Furthermore, major US research projects and some academic careers have been abruptly halted. This will not help productivity in the US or elsewhere. Hopefully, the relative stability and academic freedom of Europe will prove attractive to international companies and talent, and help fuel a European economic revival.

The UK's second quarter growth of 0.3% of GDP is commendable in the circumstances of international disruption and the deep legacy of austerity. The UK government is showing encouraging enthusiasm that AI can reduce the workload that has grown in parallel with the increased use of computers, turning GPs, police, health workers, and consumers into data collection slaves feeding the databases on which an online society depends. A reduction in such bureaucracy should result in efficiency gains and aid productivity. Perhaps we could also hope for an AI governance engine to emerge? This could be used to assess problems such as the infected blood scandal, the Horizon computer scandal, and the Grenfell Tower fire, and assess what failed and how well corrections and compensations are being delivered. Even if AI is not perfect, it would be a low bar to do better than has been achieved to date.

Our next meetings are on using pension funds for infrastructure investment, the Middle East situation, and addressing the housing shortage.

## ***Can pension funds help finance infrastructure investment?***



***10 September 2025***

***Speaker:***

***Lauren Edwards MP***

***Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Insurance and Financial Services***

There is a great need to find more ways to finance a big increase in UK infrastructure investment. One way to do this might be for pension funds to allocate more money to infrastructure projects, provided this can be done without reducing investor returns.

The government is already encouraging consolidation of pension funds and, perhaps, encouragement and incentives to increase infrastructure investment could, if properly managed, get more infrastructure built and also boost investor returns.

This roundtable discussion will be led by Lauren Edwards MP, Co-Chair of the Insurance and Financial Services All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG); Co-Chair of the Skills, Employment and Careers APPG, and member of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee.

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## ***Policy priorities for the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan***



***18 September 2025***

***Speaker:***

***Hamish Falconer MP***

***Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan***

The Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan is possibly the most politically unstable area in the world, combining immense wealth, political tensions, religious hostilities, vast inequality, and many autocratic governments. For more than a century, its enormous fossil fuel reserves helped fuel the economies of major economies. This has led the major Western powers, in their foreign policies, to prioritise secure supplies. Although the regime change in Syria and possibly another short pause in the Gaza war give some slight grounds for optimism, the area remains a tinderbox in which further conflagration could cause big problems in the area and beyond. For such reasons, we have invited Hamish Falconer MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan to lead this roundtable which will be a good opportunity for members to raise key issues that affect their own businesses.

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## ***Delivering the homes that the UK desperately needs***



***6 October 2025***

***Speaker:***

***Florence Eshalomi MP***

***Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee***

Adequate housing is essential for the social and economic functioning of a nation. Nevertheless, the UK suffers from a serious shortage of housing to buy or to rent at affordable prices, and this adversely affects living standards and labour mobility. After the destruction of WW2, the country had a continuous and successful house building programme. Much of the housing stock in this period, was owned and managed by councils who could adjust rents to allow for the circumstances of tenants. However, policy changes in the 1980s allowed council tenants to buy their homes and also drastically reduced council house building programmes. Since then, house purchase prices and rental prices have climbed greatly in relation to incomes, and the rate of building of new housing has declined. The current government has undertaken to address the housing shortage by overseeing the building of 300,000 houses per year

for the five-year duration of this parliament. Florence Eshalomi MP, Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, will lead this roundtable looking at the plans for this programme and the obstacles that must be addressed.

Our other meeting plans for 2025 include:

- Working closely with Europe
- Regulation versus growth: lessons from consumer credit
- Achieving Labour's energy mission
- International relations and defence diplomacy
- Decarbonising homes - making it happen
- Improving our digital infrastructure would be a win/win for businesses and the economy
- Policy priorities for safe and sustainable, high-quality buildings.
- An integrated plan for the UK road and rail networks
- How mobile infrastructure investment can boost UK growth

These are all major topics which we hope to cover in some depth at meetings and possibly policy workshops.

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## **Big Change Research Programme 2025**

Work is proceeding on the following topics:

### **The big decisions facing Europe in the Trump II era**

Our work so far suggests that the 40 plus democratic European nations are in a new environment in which Russia is more overtly hostile, the US will not provide dependable military guarantees, and the US is prepared to interfere in the internal politics of European nations. These changes frame the decisions Europeans need to take on building an independent European military capability, working together to establish a distinct, cohesive European identity, and strengthening mutual industrial and trade cooperation. We are planning to publish the results of our research, for discussion, later in 2025.

### **Could proportional representation combat the threat of populism?**

The 2024 UK general election gave the winning Labour party a flattering proportion

of parliamentary seats at the expense of some of the four smaller parties. Analysis indicates that in the current environment of a five-party system, there is a real possibility that the current first-past-the-post electoral system could produce a populist Government with a small proportion of the popular vote, perhaps around 30%. Proportional representation could avert such an outcome and be fairer to all parties and electors. We will publish the full results of this research study, for discussion, later in the year.

If you are interested to participate in these projects, in any way, please contact [jwyer@industry-forum.org](mailto:jwyer@industry-forum.org)

Our most recent Industry Forum events were:

### ***Fixing the skills crisis***



***16 June 2025***

***Speaker:***

***Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith  
Minister for Skills***

The key to the success of the government's ambitious plans for the economy and improved public services, is the supply of skilled workers for eight key priority industrial sectors, and public services, particularly the NHS. So, the Industry Forum was delighted that Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister for Skills was able join us to lead a roundtable on, 'Fixing the skills crisis.' The meeting was hosted by Checkatrade, and Benjamin Bell their Director of Corporate Affairs welcomed the minister and guests to the meeting at their Kings Cross HQ. It was clear that the skills strategy is a vital component of the soon-to-be-revealed industrial strategy which will encompass the delivery of net zero emissions, increased defence spending and major infrastructure investments - all programmes that will need specialist skilled workers, and provide well-paid jobs. A previously piecemeal approach to skills which confused many business people is being transformed into a framework of initiatives which will aid understanding by young people entering work, and businesses that need predictability of skilled labour supply in order to justify investments.

## ***Current issues for UK financial services and markets***



***3 June 2025***

***Speaker:***

***Lauren Edwards MP***

***Officer in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Financial Markets and Services***

With so much political attention currently on manufacturing and logistics, The Industry Forum turned its attention to 'Current issues for UK financial services.' To survey this vast topic, we invited new MP for Rochester and Strood, Lauren Edwards, who trained at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and has worked at the Bank of England and the HM Treasury, to lead a round table for members and invited guests. Lauren concisely summarised what is happening in financial services, particularly in terms of government actions to ensure the proportionate level of regulation in banking, insurance and investment. Questions raised in the Q&A included the need for a longer-term Treasury planning horizon, the risks and opportunities arising from crypto currencies, the likelihood of a Bank of England issuing a digital currency, and the continuing need to help small businesses get enough credit to maintain and expand their activities. A key theme was the need to simplify the post 2008 banking crash regulations without reducing protections and thus to enable the strong UK financial services sector to do its job of competing in international markets and supporting the UK economy.

### ***New members welcome***

The Industry Forum was established in 1993, and has held over 500 meetings with top policy-makers since then. It is one of the most experienced, and well-networked, business policy think-tanks in the UK. If you're not already a member, and would like to help shape our agenda, host events, and receive invitations to all meetings, get in touch by email at [info@industry-forum.org](mailto:info@industry-forum.org), or give us a call to find out more on 0207 434 0090.



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