

Industry Forum February Newsletter

The UK's future direction

Amid multiple challenges, a future direction for the UK is gradually taking shape. This involves restoring and preserving a high standard of public services; getting closer to Europe culturally and economically; continuing the transition towards net zero emissions, and maintaining the territorial integrity of European nations.

This approach provides a structure in which UK businesses can plan and invest, and some can hopefully attain the continental scale needed to compete with the dominant US tech companies. It should also provide the growth needed to support public services, infrastructure investment and vital new military spending. In the UK it is not the role of business to try to influence these choices, but it can support the move away from the economically disastrous policies of Brexit and towards a collaborative approach to business and trade.

In February, the Industry Forum held a roundtable for a group of European experts to discuss our research paper, 'Europe on the Brink', and Mary Creagh MP and DEFRA minister is coming to talk about the circular economy later in February. We have many more meetings in planning as we try to cover the big range of political and technological changes now affecting business prospects.

We are welcoming new members to the Forum and keen to recruit more members to support our very full programme.

Representing nature and business in a circular economy



24 February 2026

Speaker:
Mary Creagh MP, Minister for Nature

For a long time, the effect of business activities on nature was largely ignored on economic or commercial grounds. This short-sightedness is now largely recognised by governments and businesses, and attaining a circular economy and long-term sustainability are given higher priority. Nevertheless, problems remain. Damage to nature can be hard to predict and difficult and time-consuming to rectify. This can occur because legal responsibility for damage is unclear or regulators lack enforcement powers. Reuse of materials can be both good for the environment and good for business, but recycling procedures are frequently inadequate. This meeting, led by Mary Creagh CBE MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature) will discuss such issues, government plans, and business priorities.

Increasing trade in plants, agricultural products, food and drink



10 March 2026

Speaker:
Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs

To meet its goals, the government needs to increase sustainable growth across the UK economy. A key to such growth is increasing international trade, especially exports, which have been badly hit by Brexit, and turbulence in international trade. This roundtable will focus on 'Increasing trade in plants, agricultural products, food, and drink.' These sectors involve food security, protection from invasive species, health risks, and more, in addition to financial considerations. Dame Angela Eagle, Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs will introduce the discussion by outlining the views and plans of the government, and then take questions.

Date for your diary:

- 22 April - Industry Forum Spring Reception with keynote speaker Dame Chi Onwurah, Chair of Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee.
- 27 April - 'An integrated plan for the UK road and rail networks' with Ruth Cadbury MP, Chair of the House of Commons Transport Select Committee

Meetings in planning include:

- 'Decarbonising homes - making it happen' with Martin McCluskey MP, Minister for Energy Consumers
- 'Working closely with Europe' led by Stella Creasy MP, Chair of Labour Movement for Europe
- Industrial Strategy Implementation
- Restoring trade with Germany
- International relations and defence diplomacy
- Improving our digital infrastructure would be a win/win for businesses and the economy
- Crypto opportunities and threats for the UK
- Policy priorities for safe and sustainable, high-quality buildings
- 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.



Big Change Research Programme

2025 projects

The big decisions facing Europe in the Trump II era

A summary of our findings and recommendations from this study was published on our website in December 2025 under the title 'Europe on the Brink'. We held a meeting to discuss this paper on 13th February and we are planning a conference on this subject later in the year.

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 present environment of a five-party national 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 discussed whether proportional representation might also lead to economic benefits at a meeting led by Anna Dixon MP on January 20th and will be publishing our research findings in February 2026.

2026 projects

We are now planning our summer 2026 research programme. We are looking at big subjects that will stretch our student researchers. Some subjects that we are considering are: What is the real value of NHS universal health care? How does the UK build a sustainable, secure energy supply system? How can Europe compete with US innovation? What digital infrastructure does the UK need to meet its economic and regional needs? Are good public services compatible with economic competitiveness? We will choose two or three topics for 2026.

If you are interested to suggest topics or to participate in summer research projects for 2026, please contact jwyer@industry-forum.org

Our most recent Industry Forum events were:

Europe on the Brink



13 February 2026

Speakers:

Denis MacShane, Former Europe Minister
Dr Jonathan Leader Maynard, Senior Lecturer in International Politics, Department of Political Economy, King's College London

Brendan Donnelly, Deputy Director, Federal Trust

The urgent questions facing Europe were the highly topical subject of last week's Industry Forum roundtable to discuss our research paper, 'Europe on the Brink.' In particular, the proposal that European nations should consider creating a new 'Alliance for Defence and Democracy,' which could rapidly assume responsibility for the unified defence of Europe. The meeting was hosted by Stephen Hockman KC at his chambers, 6 Pump Court, and the meeting was opened by a strong panel of European experts, Dr Denis MacShane, Dr Jonathan Leader Maynard and Brendan Donnelly, and followed by a discussion involving the businesspeople, diplomats and academics present. The gravity of Europe's current position was agreed, and the dangers arising from a lack of political unity among the European nations, and serious policy disagreements with the US. Other important factors discussed were that in conventional arms Russia has likely been weakened by sanctions and the

Ukraine war while Europe has increased its conventional arms capability. Political developments and initiatives are changing the situation almost daily and there was a view that the existing 34 nation 'Coalition of the Willing' on Ukraine, together with initiatives by the EU such as the 'Security Action For Europe,' may evolve into an approach which could meet the Russian threat, and also avoid a deep split with the US. This is a crucial topic, with big implications for European businesses and economies. Almost at the same time as our meeting, the German Chancellor, Friedrich Merz was powerfully covering similar points on the much larger stage of the Munich Security conference. The key factors which will influence decision-makers include: the heavy price of US military support for Europe; the need to combat Russian efforts to prevent European unity and split NATO, and how to give Europe a strong independent voice in international affairs. We hope to work with other organisations to address some of these subjects later in the year. We apologise that we didn't cover the enormous implications for climate change of the major diversion of investment to defence - we haven't forgotten.

Could proportional representation bring economic benefits?



20 January 2026

***Speaker:
Anna Dixon MBE MP***

Alert! Dangers ahead for business! This was the unmistakable message from the recent Industry Forum roundtable on the potential benefits of proportional representation for the UK economy. Anna Dixon MBE, MP for Shipley, a long-term advocate of electoral reform, opened the meeting, which was attended by Industry Forum business members, academics and, as guests, a number of campaigning organisations including Make Votes Matter, Best for Britain and Labour For a New Democracy. The key new factor in British politics is that the old duopoly of power between the Labour and Conservative parties has dissolved into a complex multiparty system. The big risk for business is resulting economic instability as the first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system turns UK national elections into a lottery. In 2024 Labour were big winners of this lottery with far more seats than their vote share. Next time the winner could be a minority government committed to reversing trade agreements, political alliances and infrastructure investment plans. Such a possible outcome can, even now, paralyse business planning and investment and undermine government growth plans. An alternative system of proportional representation could better represent voter wishes and would moderate policy

swings. With the recent example of the severe damage to the UK economy caused by Brexit, this is clearly an issue that UK businesses need to take seriously. Radical change is always hard, but with the current economic and military threats to Europe, and the need for greater European unity, the case for bold action to reform our UK voting system appears strong.

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, or give us a call to find out more on 0207 434 0090.



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