



Industry Forum March Newsletter

Here we go again!

Just as the UK's turnaround appeared to be gaining traction, the new Iran war is threatening further disruption in this decade of apparently continuing disruption. The Chancellor's Spring Statement showed a UK gradually establishing a sound economy, and we hope for further policy announcements to add some upside from the key sectors that the government has identified with good growth potential.

Relative to the US and Middle East, the UK and Europe now have some stability advantages for businesses which stock markets have already appreciated. Hopefully, this will be improved further if European leaders continue to work together to increase economic and military collaboration and independence. Europe is under pressure from the US to reverse progress towards net zero emissions, but climate change has not stopped, fossil fuel supplies continue to be contingent on geopolitical uncertainties and renewable energy is getting cheaper each year.

We were delighted by the interest shown in our discussion paper 'Europe on the Brink' and our roundtable on the circular economy led by the Minister for Nature, Mary Creagh MP. We continue to believe that, in a period of fiscal restraint, investing in the UK's digital infrastructure offers the best value for money as a means of increasing productivity across the nation. Our House of Commons Spring Reception on 22 April has a digital communications theme. It is sponsored by VodafoneThree and hosted by Dame Chi Onwurah, Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee who will give a keynote address.

We are planning a roundtable on the important topic of 'Working closely with Europe - what business needs.' We will again be running some summer research projects with Oxford undergraduates. If you are interested to participate in either of these activities, please contact Jo Wyer at jwyer@industry-forum.org.

Our next two events are:

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.

Industry Forum Spring Reception



22 April 2026

Hosted by:

Dame Chi Onwurah MP, Chair of the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee

***Sponsored by:
VodafoneThree***

Our House of Commons receptions are always lively, and give members and guests the opportunity to mix with politicians, diplomats and of course a range of business sectors. This year we have a digital communications theme because of the contribution that good digital communications can make to the Government's key goals of improving growth and productivity. We are delighted to be hosted at the House of Commons by Dame Chi Onwurah MP, who has a background in engineering and the private telecoms sector, and now chairs the Select Committee on Science, Innovation and Technology. We are also grateful to our sponsoring Industry Forum member, VodafoneThree, the UK's largest mobile operator formed by merger in 2025. If any other members have guests they would like to invite, please let Jo Wyer know.

Date for your diary:

- 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
- Working closely with Europe - What business needs
- Restoring trade with Germany
- Managing energy supplies and prices
- Addressing the bottlenecks in building homes and infrastructure
- Industrial Strategy implementation
- 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 Q2 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:

Representing nature and business in a circular economy



24 February 2026

Speaker:

Mary Creagh CBE MP, Minister for Nature

Despite a broken wrist, the Minister for Nature, Mary Creagh CBE MP was in sparkling form leading a packed Industry Forum round table. Wes Ball, Senior VP at the host, Edelman welcomed guests and Rod Dowler introduced the topic 'Representing nature and business in a circular economy.' There is a widespread awareness of the shortsightedness of ignoring the impact of business activities on nature, but it is an enormous task to align manufacturing, packaging, distribution and reuse of materials in way that makes commercial and environmental sense. Nevertheless, the government has already made considerable progress on specific issues such as standardisation of recycling classifications, a deposit return scheme for drinks bottles and cans, creation of the Western Forest, near Bristol and the release into the wild of the first beavers in the UK for 300 years; it has ambitions to do much more to help businesses and consumers move towards a circular economy. Among the wide variety of businesses present there was considerable enthusiasm for the government's plans. Discussion focussed on the many timetabling and implementation issues that inevitably arise. Such is the interest in this complex topic that we hope to return to it later in the year.

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 the recent 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.

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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