



## Industry Forum April Newsletter

### Choppy waters

The precariously paused war on Iran by the US and Israel is jeopardising UK economic recovery, and is causing new disruption. It has already demonstrated the risks of dependence on fossil fuels and underlined the dangers of military reliance on the US. Whilst we wait to see what happens, it is worth stepping back to look at the UK and Europe as a whole from a business point of view. The glaring truth is that the whole continent urgently needs money for defence, public services, and investment in infrastructure including energy transition. Countries also need to work together more closely to get the benefits of continental scale in industry and defence. The most obvious, and possibly only, decisive step the UK could take to change its economic predicament would be to fully rejoin the EU and become again a proactive participant in its evolution. This would include rejoining the Single Market, originally a UK-led project that was never fully implemented, but now needs to be completed to help restore European competitiveness.

An unexpected outcome of the hostilities in Ukraine has been the rapid evolution of military technology, particularly in relation to drones. Ukraine is leading the world in such technologies and there is also a wider recovery of the European defence sector including companies such as BAE, Rolls Royce Rheinmetall, Dassault, Arianespace, Airbus, Saab and many others. With the expertise of such companies, and the rapid technology transition in defence, Europe may be able to become stronger and more independent while cutting US imports and expanding exports to countries in the Middle East who urgently need to strengthen their defences.

Later this month we have our Spring Reception hosted at the House of Commons by Dame Chi Onwurah, Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee. This is followed by a roundtable on surface transport planning led by Ruth Cadbury MP, Chair of the Transport Select Committee. We are hoping to be able to confirm speakers and dates for our summer programme after the early May local council elections which are keeping many MPs busy at present.

We will again be running some summer research projects with Oxford undergraduates. If you are interested to participate in this programme please contact Jo Wyer at [jwyer@industry-forum.org](mailto:jwyer@industry-forum.org). We would also like to hear from members about their wishes to sponsor and participate in fringe events at Labour's Liverpool conference in September.

Our next two events are:

### ***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 business efficiency and innovation, and 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, telecoms regulation, 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 Wyr know.

---

### ***An integrated plan for the UK road and rail networks***



***27 April 2026***

***Speaker:***

***Ruth Cadbury MP, Chair of the House of Commons Transport  
Select Committee***

The government is committed to improving UK growth. A big contribution to this could come from optimising our current road and rail systems and making improvements where these will give the greatest benefits. A lot is happening that is providing new opportunities to improve transport for people and freight. For example, the government is taking overall control of rail transport, mayoral authorities are taking greater roles in local transport, better journey information is available from smartphones, and new innovations such as electric bikes and driverless taxis are introducing new and appealing travel options. We have therefore invited Ruth Cadbury MP, Chair of the Transport Select Committee to lead this roundtable on the subject of 'An integrated plan for the UK road and rail networks.'

Meetings in planning include:

- Managing the energy transition
- Realising the potential of self-driving vehicles
- Decarbonising homes - Making it happen
- Working closely with Europe
- Restoring trade with Germany
- Managing energy supplies and prices
- Addressing the bottlenecks in building homes and infrastructure
- Industrial strategy implementation
- 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

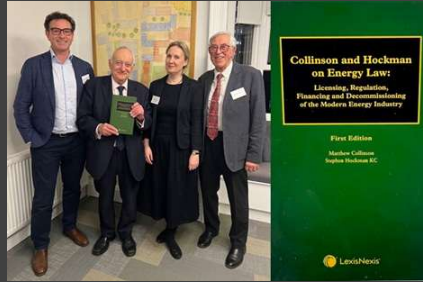
These are all major topics which we hope to cover in some depth at meetings and possibly policy workshops.

Industry Forum Executive Chair, Rod Dowler, was pleased to attend the German Business Hub Stammtisch recently. The speaker was Dr. Mark Speich, Secretary General of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.



He explained how their state-funded operation supports the centre-right CDU Deutschlands party and works with similar parties across the world. The CDU stands for a strong Europe with a liberal economy and safe borders. Dr. Speich recognised the considerable progress made by the current UK government in moving closer to the EU and rebuilding the relationship damaged by Brexit. In a world in which Europe faces threats to its territory, political structures, and economy, it is reassuring to businesses in Europe that greater cooperation between Germany and the UK could lead to the increased stability and reduced bureaucracy needed for increased trading and investment.

The Iran war has sharply reminded us all of the risks of depending on fossil fuels, and just recently the UK Climate Change Committee has published a report concluding that saving the costs of just one such disruption would justify the cost of meeting the 2050 net zero target.



The recent launch of a new book on energy law by Matthew Collinson and Stephen Hockman KC is therefore more than timely. Together with a group of mainly lawyers, Rod Dowler was pleased to attend the launch of the book, published by LexisNexis, and available online as well as in hardback. The book explores: How regulation shapes the energy transition; The consenting processes for major energy projects and; Incentives driving investment in renewables and low carbon technologies. The energy transition will involve new business opportunities covering a range of technologies and a requirement for big government and private sector investments. The Industry Forum will therefore be working with Stephen Hockman to organise meetings to bring together business people, policy-makers and lawyers to discuss the opportunities and legal issues arising, as well as the need for large-scale planning covering new infrastructure as well as obsolescent infrastructure and potentially stranded assets.



## 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](mailto:jwyer@industry-forum.org)

Our most recent Industry Forum events were:

### ***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***

The Industry Forum were delighted to welcome Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, to lead a roundtable on 'Increasing trade in plants, agricultural products, food and drink.' This is vital for the government's overall plans to increase growth, and also vital for the sectors concerned. The meeting was sponsored by the Horticultural Trades Association whose CEO, Fran Barnes opened the meeting by outlining the significant issues facing HTA members as a result of the UK's position outside the EU, our largest market. With industry specialists, major retailers and some EU diplomats present, the meeting ranged widely over the issues faced by many product sectors. It was clear that the government shares the objectives of business and is working as fast as possible to cover the many legislative changes and other practical steps needed to bring the UK and EU into better alignment, and reduce the serious trade frictions and unnecessary costs caused by Brexit.

## *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.

### *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.



---

Copyright © 2026 Industry Forum, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?  
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

