



## Industry Forum May Newsletter

### No easy answers

The UK economic recovery was on course with good 2026 Q1 GDP growth figures, but this progress is in danger of being undermined by international turbulence, particularly the Iran war, and a home-grown leadership crisis. The Industry Forum has always maintained that on economic and business grounds the most secure and prosperous future for the UK lies in taking an active role within the EU. Last December we published a short paper, 'Europe on the Brink' outlining the new threats facing the whole of democratic Europe and suggesting a way forward. In January this year, we published a paper 'The Case for UK Electoral Reform,' highlighting the risky consequences of continuing with the first-past-the-post system in a multi-party world; these predictions were proved correct in the May local elections.

While the UK leadership question is being resolved, we are taking steps to work with other organisations concerned with the key issues of European cooperation, and reform of the UK electoral system. We are holding a meeting, sponsored by Business with Europe, on plans for a UK/EU reset, and working with 'Make Votes Matter' to help businesses understand the economic and practical issues arising from our current electoral system. There is a vast amount to do to tackle such issues and continue the economic recovery in fast-changing circumstances. We will continue to promote rational dialogue as the best way to achieve lasting solutions and hope that the UK will emerge from the current leadership crisis with clarity and determination to meet the challenges facing us, without resorting to easy answers,

Last month we held a spring reception bringing together members and guests from business and politics, and also a roundtable on the major issue of achieving integrated surface transport for the country. Our research projects for this summer will cover meeting our housing and climate change targets, as well as the contribution of public services to a buoyant economy. We are planning an extensive roundtable programme for the rest of 2026.

Our most recent Industry Forum events were:

## ***Industry Forum Spring Reception***



***22 April 2026***

***Hosted by:***

***Emily Darlington MP, Member of the House of Commons  
Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee***

***Sponsored by:***

***VodafoneThree***



Doom-mongering about politics and the world was suspended for a few hours this week for the Industry Forum annual spring reception, at the House of Commons. The keynote speaker was Emily Darlington MP for Milton Keynes and a member of Dame Chi Onwurah's Select Committee for Science, Innovation and Technology. Emily, taking time off from electoral campaigning, was in buoyant form promoting the high-tech city of Milton Keynes and the promise of science and technology for the UK.



The event was sponsored by the leading UK telecoms company, newly merged VodafoneThree. George Robinson, Head of Government Affairs at VodafoneThree welcomed guests and said a few cheerful words about the progress of the merger. It

is clear that a strong digital communications infrastructure can help meet the government's growth aims and that a big new player like VodafoneThree will help to achieve this. After the formalities, the reception turned into a party with members, business guests, diplomats and academics networking and making new contacts in the way that they have done since the Industry Forum was set up 33 years ago.

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### ***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 Industry Forum held an event in April at Railway Industry Association's London offices titled 'An integrated plan for the UK road and rail networks'.

Chair of the Transport Select Committee, Ruth Cadbury MP, led a roundtable discussion on a range of topics, including: the recent publication 'Better Connected: A Strategy for Integrated Transport'; how Great British Railways will bring together track, train and property; and the opportunities available to create a more joined-up network.

At short notice we have organised a meeting with Business with Europe to discuss key issues for the European reset discussions being led by Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, Paymaster General for the UK.



This roundtable on Tuesday 19 May will provide an opportunity for participants to exchange experiences on how businesses have struggled, adapted and responded to post-Brexit trading conditions following the recent UK–EU summit negotiations. The conversation will also explore how future negotiations and cooperation between the UK and the European Union could better support British growth, stability and competitiveness. Key recommendations from the discussion will be presented at the forthcoming session of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Europe. Attendees will be business members of the Industry Forum and members of Business with Europe. The discussion will be lead by Trevor Greetham, Head of Multi-Asset at Royal London Asset Management.

After the completion of the local elections we hope to reinstate the meetings that had been deferred:

### ***Decarbonising homes - making it happen***



***Date TBC***

***Speaker:***

***Martin McCluskey MP, Minister for Energy Consumers***

Heating the UK's 28 million often poorly insulated homes comes mainly from natural gas, and currently contributes around 20% of UK carbon emissions. Therefore, decarbonisation of home heating is a vital step in achieving progress towards net zero emissions. It is made difficult by the need to finance the change, provide clear benefits to consumers and protect vulnerable households. Martin McCluskey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero will lead this roundtable on 'Decarbonising homes, making it happen'.

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***Working closely with Europe***



***Date TBC***

***Speaker:***

***Stella Creasy MP, Chair, Labour Movement for Europe***

Much has changed since the fateful 2016 referendum which led to the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union: UK GDP has taken an estimated 4% hit as a result of Brexit; public opinion has swung towards EU membership; the second Trump administration has introduced punitive tariffs affecting Europe and has also reduced US commitment to European defence; the Russia/Ukraine war has enlarged and become a wider threat to Europe, and the UK now has a Labour government favourably disposed to working with the EU. Labour MP for Walthamstow and Chair of the Labour Movement for Europe, Stella Creasy will lead this roundtable on the current practicalities and potential for working more closely with our European neighbours.

Other meetings in planning include:

- Managing the energy transition
- Realising the potential of self-driving vehicles
- 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
- Is digital sovereignty necessary and possible?
- 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.



**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. Our paper 'The Case for UK Electoral Reform,' is on our website.

## 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)

### *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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