Industry Forum July/August Newsletter

A promising transition

The transition to a new Labour Administration led by Andy Burnham has been refreshingly smooth and positive. Major cabinet changes, including most notably a new chancellor, John Healey, have been accompanied by a change in communications style led by the new PM. Consolidating two departments into one powerful Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade should provide a strong pro-business voice to counteract understandable Treasury caution, and help rebuild business confidence. We are delighted to see that many of the ministerial team have been speakers at Industry Forum events over the past few years.

The international environment continues to be challenging as the UK struggles to cope with volatile energy prices and the need to divert resources to defence spending, while also trying to reduce the severe damage to trade done by Brexit. But, as the country recovers its mojo it has a lot to offer large and small businesses alike. The government has a massive majority to maintain its stability for three years and an inclination to listen and build cooperation rather than stoke division. We look forward to playing any part we can in this process.

We already have a fantastic Autumn programme shaping up. In September, we have meetings on the important topics of industrial policy, European relations and the vital topic of finance for innovation and infrastructure.

During the summer months we are continuing to build our exciting research programme with a wonderful team of new Oxford graduates. Last year, our research topics were on the growing military and political threats to Europe, and the need for a UK electoral system based on proportional representation. This year we are looking at UK progress on housebuilding; tackling climate change; considering whether good public services are compatible with a competitive economy; and also how we can compete with US innovation.

Our next meetings are:

Industrial Strategy Implementation

Wednesday 9 September

Speaker:
Blair McDougall MP, Minister for Reindustrialisation

In a fast changing world, every nation needs an industrial strategy to safeguard their prosperity and make the best use of their resources and talents. In the 20th century, the UK transformed from being an imperial power to a member of the EU, and with the development of the single market developed its industrial strategy as part of a powerful economic bloc. That approach ended with the Brexit referendum in 2016. Since then, the UK has worked to articulate and implement an industrial strategy for its new role as a medium-sized, economically independent, nation. Blair McDougall MP, Department of Business, Innovation, Science and Trade Minister for Reindustrialisation, will lead a discussion on government plans and progress in implementing a successful industrial strategy.

Reinvigorating the relationship with Europe

Thursday 10 September

Speaker:
The Lord Darroch of Kew KCMG, Former Ambassador to the US and EU Permanent Representative

Much has changed since the UK left the European Union. The policies and behaviour of both Russia and the United States now threaten to undermine the European continent politicly and territorially, and the economic benefits of taking back control of trade policies have failed to compensate for the loss of business with the EU. In this situation, there is a clear incentive for the UK and EU to try to reinvigorate their relationship covering economics, defence, and political stability and security. For businesses making plans for their European operations, it is essential to understand the current complex situation and how this might develop. Kim Darroch, Former Ambassador to the US and EU Permanent Representative, will lead a high level discussion on these topics.

Generating greater domestic investment to power growth

Tuesday 15 September

Speaker:
Callum Anderson MP

The UK has deep capital markets, a top international stock exchange and many retail stock market investors. Nevertheless, we frequently depend on international investors to fund public infrastructure and private sector projects, and companies. Callum Anderson, MP for Buckingham and Bletchley and Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Women and Equalities, who previously worked at the London Stock Exchange, will kick off a discussion on how this situation could be changed enabling UK domestic investment to help power growth. As usual this meeting will provide a good opportunity for members to raise questions and make policy suggestions based on their own experiences.

The benefits of a new agenda for our financial services industry

Thursday 17 September

Speaker:

Lord Pitt-Watson, Parliamentary Secretary at HM Treasury

The UK has a strong financial services sector which competes internationally in the top tier, and contributes a lot to the national economy. Key long-term issues for the UK are how to harness this strength for investment in domestic infrastructure and the provision of risk capital to back British innovation. Success in doing this would reduce foreign ownership of British infrastructure and help retain promising early-stage technology companies with good growth prospects. Leading this discussion of a new agenda for UK financial services will be Lord David Pitt-Watson, a newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury. David is a Scottish business and social entrepreneur, academic and author who is a strong advocate of responsible investment and has extensive experience of successful fund management.

Other meetings in planning include:

- Decarbonising homes - making it happen
- Realising the potential of self-driving vehicles
- Restoring trade with Germany
- Managing energy supplies and prices
- Addressing the bottlenecks in building homes and infrastructure
- 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.

Our most recent Industry Forum events were:

How can Europe compete with US innovation?

13 July 2026

While Westminster awaits the new UK Burnham administration with bated breath, the Industry Forum and Business with Europe held a meeting in central London on the topic of 'How can Europe compete with US innovation.' Policies of the Trump administration, and the military threat from Russia, both point to an urgent need for Europe to raise its game in the tech industries. The scope of this challenge is vast but the view from members and guests was that an urgent first step is to address the UK regulatory burden caused partially by Brexit and partially by the policies and regulations adopted by the EU. The Industry Forum is conducting a short research project on this subject over the Summer and we will have a discussion paper ready for the Autumn when we hope to hold further, more detailed meetings in conjunction with Business with Europe.

UK-EU reset priorities

19 May 2026

The Industry Forum and Business with Europe held a productive meeting to discuss UK-EU reset progress and priorities prior to the next summit meeting, likely in July 2026. It is clear that the relationship between the UK and the EU has dramatically improved since the election of the UK Labour government. The discussion was led by Trevor Greetham and Nick Harvey, CEO of European Movement UK, also participated. Useful progress to improve trade is being made in a number of sectors but the UK government's red lines mean that dramatic and rapid improvements are unlikely. This will make it difficult for the government to reduce the extra Civil Service staff costs incurred to cope with Brexit, and there will be a similar cost burden for private sectors. For example, chemical industries have had to employ hundreds of extra chemists to deal with post Brexit regulations and many SMEs have had to accept the costs of increased regulation, or cease trading with EU customers. Hopefully, such economic considerations, and the transformed and more threatening geopolitical environment since 2016 will give rise to a more fundamental revision of the UK-EU relationship.

What IF?

Big Change Research Programme

2026 projects

We are now starting our summer 2026 research programme. As before we have chosen big topical subjects that will stretch our student researchers. These are:

- Will the government meet its housing and new homes targets?

- Are UK climate change measures on track?
- How can Europe compete with US innovation?
- Are good public services compatible with economic competitiveness?

Of these, we still need a funding sponsor for the climate change project. Please contact Jo Wyer for more details of if you wish to participate or in any way contribute to these projects.

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.