

BCC reacts to Queen's Speech

BCC gives its reaction to the 2017 Queen's Speech.

21 June 2017

Commenting on the Queen's Speech, Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) said:

"While Brexit isn't the top immediate priority for many businesses, firms of every size and shape want to avoid turbulence and confusion during the Brexit transition. The government's proposed bills on trade, customs and immigration must minimise adjustment costs and maximise opportunities. Achieving this will require continuous and constructive engagement with business communities across the UK.

"Importantly, many of the real, practical priorities for businesses across the UK can be delivered without new primary legislation. Ministers must inject real momentum and pace into the major infrastructure schemes that have already been agreed and announced. They must cut back on the stifling up-front costs that deter investment and risk-taking, and press ahead with an Industrial Strategy that helps places across the UK achieve their potential. This is an important moment for ministers to show that they are doing their day job, and delivering a stronger environment for growth here at home.

"Businesses want to see a workable government going about its day job, and clear signals that the economy is once again front and centre in political life. Consensus and a strong partnership between government and business will be critical at a time of significant change."

On the Customs Bill:

"Chambers of Commerce facilitate tens of billions of pounds worth of UK trade across borders every year. We stand ready to work with the government to develop a UK customs system that supports free-flowing trade between UK firms and their customers and suppliers around the world. It is crucial that business and government work together, as well, to ensure that a new UK customs code underpins seamless trade between the UK and the continent in the years to come."

On Immigration Bill:

"The needs of the economy must be at the heart of this once-in-a-generation overhaul of the UK's immigration system. While businesses accept the need for controls over migration flows, they want clear assurances that they will be able to recruit from overseas to fill vacancies when they are unable to find or train suitable candidates here at home.

"After Brexit, they will also want to see a flexible system for the movement of labour and skills between the UK and the EU that enjoys clear public

support. This is also a major opportunity to simplify the Home Office's bureaucratic processes, which impose heavy costs and great uncertainty on businesses and individuals alike."

On the Trade Bill:

"Safeguarding and retaining the favourable terms of trade that UK businesses have enjoyed under EU free trade agreements negotiated by the EU over the past four decades must be a top priority for ministers as the UK develops its own trade policy. The firms we represent say that confirming existing levels of market access is a bigger immediate priority than launching new free trade negotiations with new countries and markets around the world. They also need ground-level trade promotion and support to take advantage of the opportunities that new trade agreements may create in future."

On the Great Repeal Bill:

"At a time of change, businesses want as much short-term certainty and stability as possible on their regulatory obligations. This bill must deliver continuity and the day-one equivalence that is necessary for businesses to continue to trade seamlessly with customers and suppliers, both in Europe and across the world."

On the HS2 Phase 2A Bill:

"We welcome the government's commitment to legislate for the second phase of HS2, which will extend the benefits of the line to many more business communities. However, we will continue to press for the completion of a full national network – and to ensure that other key road and rail priorities, both small and large, are fully funded and executed throughout the UK. We need to have the fundamentals right here at home, including infrastructure, to trade successfully in the future regardless of the eventual Brexit deal."

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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BCC comments on the start of Brexit negotiations

On the day negotiations begin on the UK's departure from the European Union, Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

"As Brexit talks commence, UK firms want practical economic issues to be at the heart of the negotiations. Business wants an atmosphere of pragmatism, civility and mutual respect to characterise this complex process.

"Over the coming weeks and months, the UK government must demonstrate how it is working to address the everyday considerations of British companies in the talks – who can they hire, whether their goods will be stopped at borders, and whether they will have to cope with extra costs.

"Parties on both sides should begin the negotiations by seeking to guarantee the rights of EU citizens already in the UK, and UK citizens in the EU-27.

Swift agreement on citizens' rights would remove a highly emotive and politicised issue from the complex road ahead, while at the same time ending a year-long source of uncertainty for individuals, communities and employers alike.

"It's important to remember that negotiations on some of the most crucial business issues, such as the nature of the future UK-EU trading relationship, won't begin straight away. We will continue to campaign for the priorities and concerns of business communities across the UK as negotiations continue – and ensure that their practical priorities are front and centre."

Ends

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Redefining the UK's Relationship with the EU: Principles for economic success and prosperity

A statement from the UK's Leading Business Organisations

18 June 2017

We, the undersigned, represent hundreds of thousands of businesses across the United Kingdom employing millions of people.

The business community fully accepts the decision of voters last June that the UK will leave the European Union. We have come together to urge the Government to put the economy first as it prepares to start formal negotiations on the UK's departure from the European Union. This is a deal that when finally agreed will matter fundamentally for the UK economy, for UK companies and for citizens of the UK. A deal that supports growth will allow companies to hire more people, raise living standards and improve lives across the country.

We call on the Government to ensure that negotiations take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and engage continuously with UK business interests on the many crucial and complex aspects of our future economic relationship with the European Union. If the Government moves forward in real partnership with business, drawing on its expertise, it will be in a strong position to protect and strengthen the UK's economy during this vital period and beyond.

ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE UK'S TRANSITION OUT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Maintain the economic benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union until a final settlement between the United Kingdom and the European Union is agreed and implemented
- Prioritise an early agreement on guarantees for EU citizens, providing much needed reassurance for those already resident in the United Kingdom, and for UK citizens already resident in the EU27
- Maintain an open frictionless border between Ireland and Northern Ireland; and between Great Britain and the island of Ireland

ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES FOR A FINAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UK AND THE EU27

- Tariff-free goods trade between the United Kingdom and the European Union
- Minimal customs formalities at the land, sea and air borders between the United Kingdom and the European Union
- Regulatory equivalence and mutual recognition of standards on an ongoing basis to ensure continued mutual access for both goods and services
- A flexible system for the movement of labour and skills between the United Kingdom and the European Union, that enjoys public support
- On-going UK participation in those pan-European programmes, initiatives and agencies which add real economic value to communities, businesses, young people and universities
- Protection of the benefits of free trade agreements currently delivered through the European Union

We recognise these are high-level principles, in an environment of great complexity and detail. We will work closely with each other and with government to explore ways to give effect to these principles.

Adam Marshall, Director General – British Chambers of Commerce

Carolyn Fairbairn, Director General – CBI

Terry Scuoler, Chief Executive – EEF

Mike Cherry, National Chairman – Federation of Small Businesses

Stephen Martin, Director General – Institute of Directors

BCC congratulates Nora Senior on CBE

BCC's immediate past-President, Nora Senior, awarded CBE for services to business.

Friday, 16th June 2017

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is delighted that its immediate past-president, Nora Senior, has been recognised with a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

The honour is being awarded for services to British and Scottish businesses during her term as President of the British Chambers of Commerce and Chair of Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

Nora held the voluntary post of President of the British Chambers of Commerce

for three years between July 2013 and July 2016 and the office of Chair of Scottish Chambers between January 2013 and April 2017. She is the first woman to have held the honorary position in SCC in its history and the only person to have held the two national Presidents' offices simultaneously since the Chamber movement was formed over 300 years ago.

Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce said:

"All of us at the British Chambers of Commerce are delighted to see Nora Senior's many years of dedicated service to business communities across the UK recognised.

"First as a Board member and then as President of the British Chambers of Commerce, Nora gave hugely of her time and talent to support and champion Chamber business communities. She is the embodiment of what I like to call a civic business leader – for whom business success and community go hand-in-hand."

Nora Senior said:

"I am immensely proud and humbled. It is a huge honour to receive such recognition; a tremendous tribute to the Chamber Network who work tirelessly to promote business interests and great recognition for the important role communications has in driving business growth and success. I am very proud to have had the opportunity to contribute to and influence policy in key areas such as international trade, education and women in business."

During her tenure Nora launched a British Chambers International Trade Advisory Council, comprising over 20 Chairmen and CEOs of major UK companies who operate in global markets, including Diageo; Land Rover; Wrightbus and IAG. They act as ambassadors to champion the work of overseas Chambers and encourage companies to enter into exporting and new overseas markets.

Liz Cameron OBE, Director & CEO of Scottish Chambers of Commerce, added:

"Nora is one of the most influential and respected figures in the business community and a most deserving recipient of this prestigious honour. We are delighted that this has been recognised. She has worked tirelessly to promote and represent the Scottish Chambers Network and Scotland as a great place to do business, whilst establishing a strong legacy of enabling business growth. Practically, she has led an expansion of our international trade support by establishing partnerships with our Global Chamber Network, helped create and promote more opportunities for our young people, and has fostered stronger collaboration between business and Government. Nora has been a trailblazer for the business community.

"I have no doubt that she will continue to act as a source of inspiration to business people from all walks of life as she continues her business journey."

Ends

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BCC: Strong employment figures but key challenges remain

Suren Thiru, Head of Economics, comments on the labour market statistics for June 2017.

14 June 2017

Commenting on the labour market statistics for June, released today by the Office for National Statistics, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“With employment continuing to rise and unemployment falling, the UK jobs market remains on a firm footing.

“However, the strong headline figures mask some significant concerns. The gap between pay and price growth is now significant, and if inflation continues to rise as we expect, this could push UK growth materially lower by slowing household spending – a driver of UK economic growth. Employment levels may also moderate over the near term as the escalating burden of upfront business taxes and costs, and political uncertainty, dampen firms’ hiring intentions.

“The continued rise in the number of vacancies is further evidence of the growing skills shortage. While employment levels are high by historic

standards, businesses report that they are increasingly struggling to find staff with the right skills, which is constraining investment and productivity.

“The new government must make it a priority to tackle the UK’s chronic skills shortage, including easing the burden of upfront business costs to help firms recruit and train staff, and deliver a future immigration regime based on the needs of the UK economy.”

Ends

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