

Liz Truss ramps up engagement with trade unions and civil society groups

- International Trade Secretary steps up engagement with stakeholders across the UK as trade talks with Australia, New Zealand and US proceed at pace and we prepare for the end of the transition period.
- New trade union advisory group created to advise government on how to protect and advance workers' interests as part of UK trade policy.
- Strategic Trade Advisory Group (STAG) relaunched with expanded membership to reflect the UK economy and ensure a wider range of voices are represented.

The creation of a new trade union advisory group has been announced today by the Secretary of State for International Trade, as part of a major drive to ramp up engagement on trade policy with key stakeholders (Friday 16 October).

Launched today at an event in Whitehall, the new group will see representatives from some of the UK's leading trade unions advise the government on how to protect and advance the interests of workers as part of its UK trade policy.

The move comes as trade talks with New Zealand, Australia and the US enter their crucial latter stages, and forms part of the government's bid to ensure diverse interests and voices are heard as the UK prepares to become a fully independent trading nation from January 1st.

Their advice will be used to help inform the government's trade policy agenda over the long-term and help it deliver trade deals that benefits all parts of the UK.

As part of today's announcement, DIT is also expanding and refreshing the membership of its Strategic Trade Advisory Group (STAG) – the department's main trade policy advisory group – to reflect the modern UK economy. The revamped STAG will hold its first meeting today, and will feature new civil society representatives, including a new Environment and Climate seat, and more 'nationwide' business representatives from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, bringing the total number of members to 21.

The STAG is a forum for high-level strategic discussion between government and stakeholders from a cross-section of society, including business, labour and consumer groups with a key interest in UK trade policy.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

I want our trade policy to benefit workers, the environment, business and families, and for every person and company in the country to feel fully engaged as we become an independent trading nation once again.

That is why today I am stepping up engagement with trade unions and civil society organisations to bring them closer to discussions and ensure all voices are heard. Listening to a wider range of interests will ultimately help us strike better trade deals and drive economic growth across all parts of the country, resulting in more highly-skilled jobs, more opportunities and more prosperity for British people.

CEO of Fairtrade Foundation, Michael Gidney said:

I am delighted to re-join this vital group and ensure that the voices of civil society are heard at this crucial time, including those of Fairtrade farmers and workers supplying goods to the UK market. Trade policy has an impact on all our lives and we must ensure deals that work for the UK and its partners, by delivering benefits that include poverty reduction and environmental goals.

I look forward to working with ministers in pursuit of a “gold standard” trade policy which benefits the whole of society at home and abroad.

Dame Carolyn Fairbairn, CBI Director-General, said:

Working hand in hand with business is a proven way to boost trade and the benefits it brings. Consulting firms alongside civil society and trade unions will give Government the live insight it needs to strike the best deals. The CBI and our members are committed to helping the STAG position Britain as a world leader in free, fair and inclusive trade.

As part of the department’s increased engagement with key stakeholders, Ministers will also hold a series of roundtables with civil society groups to hear their views and concerns, with the first of the series also taking place today. The meetings will cover issues like the environment, sustainability, development and gender as they relate to trade policy.

The new trade union advisory group is separate from the STAG and Trade Advisory Groups. The trade union advisory group will contribute to the ongoing work of DIT in formulating trade policy that works for all areas and people of the UK.

The first meeting of the trade union advisory group will take place today, and it will meet at least three times a year, or as required, to support policy development. It will be chaired by Minister Jayawardena.