

News story: David Mundell announces new Scottish business taskforce ahead of trip to Paraguay and Argentina

Former UK Government minister Andrew Dunlop has been commissioned by the Scottish Secretary to chair a group made up of leading figures with expert knowledge of Scotland's business and economy. The group's membership will be announced shortly.

David Mundell said:

The UK Government's new Scottish business taskforce will provide expert advice and guidance on how best to strengthen Scotland's economy. We know that Scotland's economic performance lags behind the rest of UK, and we need to close that gap. As we develop our ambitious industrial strategy and negotiate new trade deals with Europe and around the world, this expert panel will provide insight from a range of Scottish business sectors.

The Scottish Secretary made the announcement ahead of a trip this week to Paraguay and Argentina. He will use his visit to promote Scottish business interests and build cultural and educational links. Scottish firms already do substantial business in South America – Scotch whisky, for example, exports more than £14 million and £12 million a year to Paraguay and Argentina respectively. Scottish agritech companies are also keen to create opportunities in Paraguay's dynamic agricultural sector.

Speaking ahead of his visit Mr Mundell said:

As we are prepare to leave the EU, we want to build and strengthen our trade relationships with friends and partners old and new, and I am certain Scottish companies will be at the forefront of this. Scotland's skills, products and services are highly regarded globally, and we can build on that as we strike ambitious new trade deals around the world. I am travelling to South America this week to bang the drum for Scottish businesses, taking the message to these markets that Scotland's companies have the skills, products and expertise they need.

There are strong historic links between Scotland and Paraguay, going back nearly 200 years, and I hope to further strengthen the relationship between our two countries. I will be promoting Scottish businesses, including looking at opportunities in Paraguay's agricultural sector and for Scottish exports – building on the success of whisky sales to Paraguay.

UK companies have an extensive presence in Argentina, with enormous scope to expand, particularly in new technology and in oil and gas, areas where Scottish firms are among the best in the world. There are also strong cultural links between Scotland and Argentina, including through the Edinburgh Festivals, and I very much look forward to cementing these links.

In Paraguay, Mr Mundell will meet prominent senior political and business figures, and make a keynote speech about the place of the UK in a post-Brexit world. He will also host a reception to promote Scottish produce and meet local civil society organisations working to combat discrimination .

In Argentina, Mr Mundell will meet cultural organisations, host a whisky tasting for business leaders and community groups, and meet a number of local businesses. He will also visit San Andrés University to hear about their links with St Andrew's University, and attend a commemoration to mark Argentinian pilots' contribution to the Battle of Britain.