

Press release: Board of Trade convenes to ensure the benefits of free trade are spread throughout the Union

- Welsh Secretary joins President of the Board of Trade Dr Liam Fox at the first new Board of Trade today in Bristol
- First meeting attended by representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Advisers from across the United Kingdom present, providing local expertise to guide the Board on trade and investment matters

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns will today (12 October) take his place at the table of the new Board of Trade convened to help boost exports, attract inward investors and ensure the benefits of free trade are spread equally across the country.

The new Board of Trade will bring together prominent figures from business and politics from each part of the UK to provide local expertise and guide the Board on trade and investment matters.

Alun Cairns will be joined two expert business advisers from Wales, Lord Rowe Beddoe and Heather Stevens CBE.

Lord Rowe Beddoe has a distinguished international business career and brings with him decades of experience gathered during his years as Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency and Cardiff Airport.

Heather Stevens CBE was part of the small team which launched the insurance group Admiral in 1993 in Cardiff. Since its launch Admiral has grown to become one of the largest private sector employers in Wales with a turnover of more than £2bn. She is also currently the chair and founding member of The Waterloo Foundation, an independent grant-making foundation, dedicated to projects that help globally such as support for child development and protecting the environment.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Every day in every country around the world, there are business opportunities for Welsh companies' products and services. But we know that striking out into new and unfamiliar markets can sometimes look daunting – particularly now as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

The Board of Trade will engage with the whole of the UK on our global trade and investment agenda and aim to demonstrate that there has never been a better time for Welsh companies to export overseas.

I'm delighted to be joined by Lord Rowe Beddoe and Heather Stevens in this effort. Together, we will be a strong voice for Wales as we aim to help more businesses across the nation build their brand abroad and encourage more inward investment to our shores.

Wales is already an exporting nation. There are currently more than 3,800 businesses in Wales that export, with a combined value of £13 billion in the first quarter of 2017. Wales is also an attractive place for inward investment, with latest figures showing that 85 foreign direct investment projects were secured in Wales, creating 2,581 new jobs and safeguarding almost 9,000 more.

To mark the reconvening of the Board of Trade, Mr Cairns will visit Pontypridd based business Concrete Canvas which is celebrating another record breaking year of export growth, with 85 per cent of turnover directly resulting from export sales. (See case study below). The company has benefitted from UK Government support to access new global markets and is now looking to explore export opportunities across Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and other neighbouring countries in the region.

Darren Hughes, International Business Development Manager, Concrete Canvas said:

When we first started exporting, we received invaluable support from the Department for International Trade (DIT), both with specific market advice and funding for trade missions and in-market projects. We gained a lot from visiting our target markets in person and meeting local contacts whilst we were there.

DIT provided important advice to us when entering new markets and the potential risks, helping us to grow our revenue streams, but whilst safeguard our intellectual property – the foundation of our business.

The Board of Trade will meet four times a year with meetings rotated around the UK guaranteeing all parts of the union have a chance to raise the issues most important to them.

The first meeting will be held today at Bristol Robotics Lab. The lab which brings together over 200 academics, researchers and industry practitioners, is the most comprehensive academic centre for multi-disciplinary robotics research in the UK, and is spearheading Britain's efforts to become a world leader in modern advanced robotics.

The agenda of the meeting will include a Bristol Airport Presentation on Regional Transport Access, an area that will be key in the promotion of future UK exports for the whole of the UK.

The President will also invite a discussion on how the Board will promote a

culture of exporting and investing across the whole of the UK and celebrate the very best of British businesses which are already creating jobs and driving prosperity through their international outlook.

Concrete Canvas

Welsh business Concrete Canvas is celebrating another record breaking year of export growth, with 85 per cent of turnover directly resulting from export sales.

Founded by Peter Brewin and Will Crawford, Concrete Canvas manufactures a range of innovative products that disrupt traditional construction techniques. The material is a flexible concrete impregnated fabric that hardens on hydration to form a thin, durable, water proof and fire resistant concrete layer. The duo invented their unique material technology whilst studying Innovation Design Engineering at Imperial College and the Royal College of Art.

Their first concept was the Concrete Canvas Shelter, a rapidly deployable hardened shelter which only requires air and water for construction. Essentially, the Shelter is a “building in a bag”. This product won numerous accolades, including a Saatchi & Saatchi award for World Changing Ideas and was the subject of a National Geographic short video which has received over 10 million views and generated immeasurable international interest in the product.

Whilst the domestic market was key to proving the business model and providing early growth during the company’s infancy, international markets were quickly identified as an enormous potential opportunity and key to the long-term success of the business. In the last six years, the company has attended numerous trade missions, OMIS and ITO projects across South East Asia, Oceania and MENA resulting in the strong distribution network that Concrete Canvas now has in place as its primary route to market.

The company has now exported to 85 countries globally, with continued double-digit growth year on year.

In the last financial year, over 85 per cent of turnover came from export sales.

Concrete Canvas is now looking to explore export opportunities across Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and other neighbouring countries in the region. The company recently attended a trade mission to Kazakhstan with support from the Department for International Trade (DIT). In-country DIT International Trade Advisers were on hand to provide specialist advice on international market research, product assessment and sourcing local partners to work with.

The company has grown rapidly and now employs over 40 staff, with 4 based overseas in regional hub offices in Sydney, Kuala Lumpur, Durban and Brussels.

Notes to Editors

Further info

(i) Secretary of State for Department for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Chair)

(i) Secretary of State for Scotland

(ii) Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

(iii) Secretary of State for Wales

England (6)

(i) Patricia Hewitt – outgoing Chair of UK India Business Council

(ii) Andrew Mills – CEO Virtualstock

(iii) Collette Roche – Chief of Staff, Manchester Airport

(iv) Marnie Millard – CEO Nichols PLC

(v) Iqbal Ahmed – Chairman, Chief Executive and Founder of Seamark Group

(vi) Edward Timpson – former Minister of State for Children and Families

Scotland (2)

(vii) Brian Wilson – former Trade Minister

(viii) Ian Curle – CEO of Edrington Group

Wales (2)

(ix) Lord Rowe-Beddoe – former Chair of Welsh Development Agency

(x) Heather Stevens – Chair and founding member of The Waterloo Foundation

Northern Ireland (1)

(xi) Mark Nodder (CEO of Wrights Group)