

Press release: International Trade Secretary visits World Trade Organization

The International Trade Secretary is visiting the World Trade Organization today in final preparations for the UK taking its independent seat as soon as we leave the European Union.

Dr Liam Fox met with key WTO figures to reinforce the groundwork for strong diplomatic relationships post-Brexit and to set out the UK's priorities for global trade.

His top priorities include ensuring that businesses can keep trading with the UK on the same terms as they do now; supporting efforts to modernise the global trade rules so they are fit for the 21st century; and helping a wide-range of countries to benefit from the global trading system.

The UK's programme at the WTO is on track to provide continuity for businesses through our goods and services schedules, which replicate as far as possible our existing trading terms.

In addition, WTO members confirmed last week the UK's independent membership of the Government Procurement Agreement which will allow British businesses to continue bidding for £1.3 trillion of public sector contracts around the world.

Dr Fox has announced today that the UK will play an active and significant role in the first ever formal negotiations to update global rules for online trade, after years of informal talks on the issue.

He has also confirmed that the UK, as Chair in Office of the Commonwealth, is contributing funding for the Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) to help some of the world's least developed and most remote countries to represent themselves at the WTO.

This benefits members including the Solomon Islands, Pacific Islands Forum, Guyana and Malawi.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

As soon as we leave the European Union, the UK will have an independent seat at the World Trade Organization and will use this to be one of the most vocal supporters of free trade.

I would like to thank our trading partners for their support throughout more than 30 months of negotiations and cooperation.

This will allow us to keep trading as closely as we do today, and I look forward to building even stronger trading relationships post-Brexit.

Top of our agenda is defending and reforming the global rules-based system. This includes modernising the trade rules and we will play an active role in the WTO's first ever digital trade negotiations, as well as helping some of the world's poorest countries to make their voices heard.

UK Permanent Representative to the WTO, Julian Braithwaite said:

The UK is a founding member of the World Trade Organization and the multilateral trading system that has been central to removing barriers to trade and promoting prosperity around the world.

The UK Mission in Geneva is ready to support the UK's new role in the WTO as we leave the European Union, preserving the gains that have been achieved and extending the benefits of trade still further.

Today's visit will help to establish strong alliances with countries that will be crucial in defending and reforming the global rules-based trading system.

Dr Fox is convening a meeting with close multilateral partners, including WTO ambassadors from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Finally, he will meet with WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo to discuss the UK taking its independent seat, as well how the UK will be able to support efforts to reform the WTO in the years ahead.