[UK-Ghana trade links boosted as political and business leaders meet in London]

Economic ties between the UK and Ghana were boosted this week as the UK-Ghana Business Council (UKGBC) met in London.

Minister for Africa Vicky Ford and Minister for Trade Policy Penny Mordaunt co-chaired the discussions and Minister for Trade & Industry Alan Kyerematen led the senior delegation from Ghana.

The formation of the UK-Ghana Investors Group, made up of investors and business leaders with the aim of creating investment opportunities, was announced and UK representatives welcomed recent deals in the gold supply chain and security sectors worth more than £100 million.

Established in 2018, the UKGBC is a high-level forum to promote bilateral relations and partnerships between Ghana's private sector and UK counterparts.

Minister for Africa Vicky Ford said:

> The UK and Ghana trade is already worth almost a billion pounds per year, but there is so much more our two economies can do together.

> The signature of the UK-Ghana Trade Partnership Agreement last year paved the way for closer economic ties and this week we've discussed the potential for huge growth in both countries, driven by British International Investment's ambitious plan for the year ahead.

> I'd like to thank the Trade Minister for contributing to such a valuable discussion and look forward to visiting Ghana in the weeks to come.

Minister for Trade Policy Penny Mordaunt said:

> The UK's trade ties with Ghana already help businesses in both our nations flourish, and I'm determined to deepen these ties to create more jobs and deliver mutual prosperity.

> I'm delighted we have now been able to meet in person at this UK-Ghana Business Council, to identify further barriers to trade and increase market access, particularly in the maritime and digital sectors.

> This will also allow us to continue excellent progress on the UK-Ghana Trade Partnership Agreement, and I look forward to working with Ghanaian counterparts to finalise the remaining elements of the deal.

Ghana is one of the fastest-growing economies in the region and the UK's fourth-biggest export market in sub-Saharan Africa, with the UK aiming to boost UK-Ghana trade to £1.4 billion by 2024.

Since the last meeting of the UKGBC, the UK-Ghana economic partnership has supported more than £223m of investment in infrastructure across the country, the biggest UK investment into infrastructure in Ghana in a generation.

The Council meeting also took place just weeks after announcing a £2 million partnership with UK charity Shell Foundation, to turbocharge Ghana's e-mobility, battery, solar and charging sector.

Members of the council celebrated the achievements of the UK-Ghana partnership over the last year, including:

- UK companies working across Ghana including Mabey Bridge, One Web and Quant have this year delivered roads, bridges and security, as well as high-speed internet;
- UK support through the Jobs and Economic Transformation (JET) programme has driven growth in Ghana's auto, garments and pharma sectors and drawn global investment toward Ghana.
- The UK-Ghana Trade Partnership Agreement, signed in 2021, is providing concrete benefits for both the UK and Ghana by allowing Ghana duty-free, quota-free access to UK markets.
- British International Investment has named Kwabena Asante-Poku, a former partner and Head of Transaction Services in Ghana and Nigeria at PwC, as the head of its Ghana operations. Asante-Poku updated members on BII's ambitious plans for a new SME fund in Ghana and other key projects.

The UK is committed to deepening trade ties across Africa. Last month the UK welcomed the Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area, Wamkele Mene, to London, where we announced £35 million of UK funding to support its implementation.

BEIS in the 2022 Queen’s Speech

- Queen’s Speech focuses on the priorities of the great British public – boosting economic growth to address the cost of living and creating conditions for more high-wage, high-skill jobs
- Energy Security Bill delivers on the commitment to build a sustainable homegrown energy system that is more secure, clean, and affordable, as well as enabling the extension of the energy price cap beyond 2023
- measures to help further strengthen consumer rights and protect households and businesses will also be published

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng has today (Wednesday 11 May) hailed this week’s Queen’s Speech, which reinforced the government’s commitment to boost economic growth across the country, create the conditions for more people to have high-wage, high-skill jobs, make streets safer, and support the NHS.

The speech set out the government’s legislative agenda for this parliamentary session and affirmed the government’s commitment to focus on the priorities of the British public and how the government is growing the economy to address the cost of living. This includes building a sustainable homegrown energy system, strengthening consumer rights, tackling illicit finance, reducing economic crime and helping businesses grow.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

> The Queen’s Speech reinforces our commitment to delivering on the priorities of the British public. It shows we are working to boost economic growth to tackle the cost of living, create jobs and spread opportunity across the country.
>
> We continue to stand by workers and businesses by doing whatever we can to ease their burdens as they face global pressures on the cost of living, having already supported the hardest hit with £22 billion of help.

The Queen’s Speech includes key measures that will deliver on the promises the government made at the start of this Parliament, and BEIS will be at the forefront of delivering.

This includes:

Accelerating our transition to more secure, more affordable and cleaner homegrown energy supplies

The UK is at the forefront of new, clean energy technologies. Over the past 12 years, the UK has increased renewable capacity connected to the grid by 500% – more than any other government in British history – as a result of £90 billion investment. Our British Energy Security Strategy set out plans to accelerate this further to reduce our exposure to volatile global gas prices in the long term, with a home-grown energy system based on renewable energy and low carbon technologies.

The Energy Security Bill will deliver on the government's commitment to do that, bringing into legislation measures to propel this transition to a cleaner, more affordable energy system that is fit for the future. It will also enable the extension of the energy price cap beyond 2023.

The Bill follows a £9.1 billion package of support to help households with energy bills in the immediate term and boosts protection for consumers by extending the default tariff price cap – preventing suppliers from overcharging consumers and shielding approximately 22 million households.

It also provides powers to introduce a price cap for those on heat networks to ensure they are charged a fair price for heating.

The government will fire the starting gun on new technologies, such as carbon, capture, usage and storage (CCUS), and low carbon hydrogen. Low carbon technologies, such as these, will help us meet our net zero obligation by reducing emissions from industry and provide power when the wind is not blowing, or the sun does not shine.

By introducing state of the art business models, the government will support the growth of a 10GW hydrogen economy and new CCUS industry, unlocking tens of thousands of jobs across the UK by 2030 while supporting the economic transformation of our industrial regions and giving investors certainty.

This legislation will also establish our new Future System Operator, which will look at Great Britain's energy system as a whole, integrating existing networks with emerging technologies such as hydrogen.

The Bill will also introduce competition in Britain's onshore electricity networks to encourage investment and innovation, through which consumers could see savings of up to £1 billion by 2050 on projects tendered over the next ten years.

Strengthening powers to tackle illicit finance, reduce economic crime and help businesses grow

The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill will tackle economic crime, strengthen our national security, and boost small businesses. Through the Bill, the government will crack down on the kleptocrats, criminals and terrorists who abuse our open economy. Stronger anti-money laundering rules, reforms to corporate law, and the biggest upgrade to the Companies House register in 170 years will root out wrongdoers so legitimate businesses can thrive.

Anyone setting up, running, owning or controlling a company in the UK will need to verify their identity with Companies House. Companies House will be able to challenge information that looks dubious and inform security agencies of potential wrongdoing.

The government is committed to keeping costs low for small businesses, and will introduce measures to streamline filing requirements to reduce red tape.

Millions of the UK’s small businesses will benefit from more reliable, better quality Companies House data to inform their decisions. The government will also increase transparency around limited partnerships so they can’t be used for illicit purposes.

Rebuilding trust in the UK’s audit, corporate reporting and corporate governance system

We will rebuild trust in the UK’s audit, corporate reporting and corporate governance system and the insolvency regulatory framework and ensure accountability for those with key roles in that system.

The government will prepare and publish a draft Bill to revamp the UK’s audit and corporate reporting regime, increasing the resilience and choice in the statutory audit market and reinforcing the UK’s reputation as a world-leading destination for investment.

By creating a strong new statutory regulator, tackling the dominance of the Big Four audit firms and making directors of big companies more accountable, the Bill will strengthen the UK’s position as one of the best places to do business and invest while helping reduce the risk of sudden big company collapses.

The government will also be publishing draft legislation to promote competition, strengthen consumer rights and protect households and businesses. This will protect consumers’ hard-earned cash and help them get better deals. It will do this by boosting consumers’ rights, strengthening enforcement, and promoting more competition in UK markets, so that consumers have confidence in markets and businesses compete on a level playing field.

This legislation will tackle bad business practices, such as subscription traps and fake reviews, that cost consumers money. Prepayment schemes like Christmas savings clubs will have to fully safeguard customers’ money through insurance or trust accounts.

The government will create a best-in-class competition regime, to make markets for consumer goods and services more competitive and dynamic to ensure that consumers get the best deals.

To beef up the enforcement of consumer protections, the legislation will also give the Competition and Markets Authority more powers to crack down on bad businesses ripping off consumers.

Reforming the UK’s data protection regime

The government wants to take advantage of the benefits of Brexit to create a world class data rights regime that will allow us to create a new pro-growth and trusted UK data protection framework that reduces burdens on businesses, boosts the economy, helps scientists to innovate and improve the lives of people in the UK.

The Data Reform Bill, led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, will give consumers and small businesses more control of their data and how it is used by taking powers to increase industry participation in Smart Data schemes.

Hidden Assets

Press release

In a recent very complex case in the South East, Sarah Bell, Traffic Commissioner for London and South East revoked the licence of Danehurst Transport Ltd and disqualified the transport manager, Grzegorz Zajac for an indefinite period.

The commissioner discovered a long list of maintenance failings within the operator’s business. But these were not the only significant issues in this case.

Mr Sonowski was formerly a driver for Mr Zajac’s previous company, GLZ Logistics Ltd. This company surrendered its licence and Mr Zajac offered to act as transport manager for Mr Sonowski. During the inquiry it became apparent that Mr Zajac’s involvement in ensuring safe operation was minimal. The Traffic Commissioner also noted that GLZ had been a recipient of significant funds through the Government ‘Bounce-back’ facility, alongside other debts.

The commissioner said “I can no longer allow him [Mr Zajac] to mislead Operators, Applicants, and Traffic Commissioners as to his integrity and competence. Similarly, it acts as a warning to those considering engaging him as a transport consultant. Mr Zajac’s lackadaisical approach to the role is an insult to the hard-working professional competent Transport Managers that are the mainstay of this industry.”

In a further development, the operator hired his vehicle from a company called Truckfast Hire Ltd, not a company local to him, but one he claimed had offered the best deal. This company changed its name to HGV Hire Ltd. Under further examination, it was found that Truckfast Hire Ltd has since been liquidated with money owed to HMRC, trade and expense creditors and that HGV Hire Ltd had taken over much of the business, with people linked to Truckfast involved. In addition, the directors of HGV Hire Ltd are currently disqualified from holding or obtaining a goods vehicle operator’s licence until 2031 due to previous involvement in companies called Continental Europe Express Ltd and E Haul Ltd.

The commissioner requested that her decision be sent to the Liquidator of Truckfast/Truckserve Holdings Ltd as it will enable them to potentially ascertain what happened to previous assets of Truckfast/Truckserve.

Further details can be found here

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Phase 2 referral of the proposed acquisition of the Perpetuus Group by Shanghai Kington Technologies and others

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng has today (Wednesday 11 May) written to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) instructing them to carry out an in-depth Phase 2 investigation of the proposed acquisition of the Perpetuus Group by Shanghai Kington Technologies and others on national security grounds.

The Business Secretary has ‘quasi-judicial’ powers under the Enterprise Act 2002 to intervene in certain mergers on public interest grounds. Today’s decision follows the completion of the Phase 1 process during which the CMA conducted an initial investigation of the potential competition implications of the transaction.

The CMA considered that it does not believe that it is or may be the case that the transaction may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition within a market or markets in the UK. The Phase 1 report has been published today.

Following the consideration of evidence gathered from departments across government, the Business Secretary deems that the interest of national security continues to be relevant and should be subject to further investigation. Perpetuus Group is a group of UK companies which is active in the functionalisation of graphene and other nanomaterials, which have a range of strategic applications. The government will ensure the implications of the transaction are fully considered. The CMA will report to the Business Secretary.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

> The UK remains firmly open for business, however we have been clear that foreign investment must not threaten our national security.
>
> I have considered the evidence presented to me and asked the Competition and Markets Authority to undertake an in-depth investigation so we can fully consider the implications of this transaction.

The CMA will now lead the Phase 2 investigation covering the national security implications. It will have 24 weeks (subject to a possible 8-week extension) to conduct this investigation and deliver a final report to the Business Secretary.

Next steps

When the Business Secretary has received the report, he must decide from the following options, to:

- make an adverse public interest finding in relation to the acquisition on national security grounds, and, if so, to take action to remedy any adverse effects to the public interest
- make no adverse public interest finding

Further information

The Secretary of State may make a Phase 2 reference to the CMA under section 45(4) of the Enterprise Act 2002 if he believes that is or may be the case that:

- arrangements are in progress which, if carried into effect, will result in the creation of a relevant merger situation;
- the creation of that situation may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition within any market or markets in the UK for goods or services
- the interests of national security (being the public interest consideration mentioned in the public interest intervention notice) are relevant to a consideration of the relevant merger situation concerned; and taking account only of the substantial lessening of competition and the interests of national security, the creation of the relevant merger

situation may be expected to operate against the public interest

In September 2021, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy issued a Public Interest Intervention Notice (PIIN) in respect of the acquisition.

This instructed the CMA to carry out a Phase 1 investigation on both competition and jurisdictional issues. Meanwhile, the government has been carrying out an investigation on national security grounds.

The ability to intervene in this fashion falls within the Business Secretary’s statutory powers under the Enterprise Act 2002.

The Enterprise Act 2002’s main purpose is to enable the Competition and Markets Authority to scrutinise and intervene in potentially anti-competitive mergers and acquisition activity.

The Enterprise Act 2002 also allows the relevant UK Secretary of State to make a quasi-judicial decision to intervene in mergers under the following public interest considerations:

- national security
- media plurality
- the stability of the UK financial system
- to combat a public health emergency

If the relevant Secretary of State decides to issue a PIIN, the CMA and the relevant government departments will investigate and prepare a report to assess the transaction in greater detail. If the relevant Secretary of State refers a merger on public interest grounds, he or she also takes the final decision on whether the merger operates, or may be expected to operate against the public interest, and on any remedies for identified public interest concerns.

The ability to intervene in transactions on the grounds of national security within the Enterprise Act 2002 was replaced by the National Security and Investment Act 2021 when it came into force from 4 January 2022. As this intervention was announced before the National Security and Investment Act 2021 commenced, it continues to be assessed under the Enterprise Act 2002 regime.

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