

Trade deal with Australia helps Northern Ireland manufacturer secure landmark deal

- Ballymena bus manufacturer Wrightbus secures major deal to sell zero-emission buses in Australia.
- Ground-breaking zero-emission buses will be the first of their kind built in Australia, with hydrogen-powered chassis shipped from Northern Ireland.
- Wrightbus received government funding to develop hydrogen fuel cell technology, and is set to directly benefit from the UK-Australia trade deal that will slash tariffs on bus parts.

Northern Ireland bus manufacturer Wrightbus has secured a major deal with Australia's largest bus manufacturer, which could open a significant export market and drive jobs and growth at the Ballymena-based firm.

Companies like Wrightbus, which is leading on the development of next-generation green tech, are set to benefit from the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement, which was signed last year and slashed tariffs on electric vehicles to 0%. The UK Government introduced a bill this week to help bring the free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand into force later this year.

Wrightbus has partnered with Volgren to provide its ground-breaking hydrogen fuel cell technology for the manufacture of two bus models, which will be the first of their kind built in Australia.

As well as leading the way in addressing climate change, Wrightbus is supporting jobs in Northern Ireland and the wider Northern Ireland economy, as well as jobs across the UK through its supply chain. Wrightbus currently employs over 900 permanent members of staff at its Ballymena headquarters, and it is hoped that this new deal will lead to the creation of even more permanent jobs at the site and across the local manufacturing supply chain.

Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

Northern Ireland is home to one of the UK's most dynamic manufacturing sectors, and I'm proud of our work helping companies like Wrightbus get export wins like this. They are paving the way for others to make in the UK and sell to the world.

Our historic trade agreement with Australia is tailored to the UK's strengths, and delivers for businesses, families, and consumers in Northern Ireland. By slashing tariffs and cutting red tape we are ensuring brilliant products and services reach global markets – creating jobs, boosting wages right and growing our economy.

In March 2021, Wrightbus received £11.2 million investment from the UK Government to develop low-cost hydrogen fuel cell technology, boosting the Northern Ireland economy and highlighting the Government's commitment to a net zero future.

The Volgren deal also supports future green growth by ensuring the UK and Australia work closer together to drive the development and commercialisation of low-emissions technology.

UK vehicle exports to Australia were worth £490 million in 2021 and will further benefit from all tariffs being cut to 0%.

Buta Atwal, Wrightbus CEO, said:

We're incredibly grateful to the DIT for its support in assisting Wrightbus to secure this important initial deal with Volgren in the Australian market. The UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement has helped to open up the market for us at a significant time in our continued growth.

With thousands of buses needing to be replaced in Australia over the next decade, this deal and its potential represents a fantastic opportunity not only for Wrightbus, but for the wider Northern Irish economy. We believe it could support the creation of green jobs both here in Northern Ireland and across our entire supply chain, which we're proud to say stretches across 47 counties in the UK.

Wrightbus was advised by DIT's team in Australia as they sought to break into the local market. DIT has also recently established a new trade and investment hub in Belfast to bring more investment, jobs and export opportunities into Northern Ireland. DIT will work hand-in-hand with businesses of all sizes in Northern Ireland to help them to succeed in the global marketplace through a first class-export support framework which includes the expansion of DIT's Export Academy to businesses across Northern Ireland for the first time.

The UK-Australia agreement is expected to unlock £10.4 billion of additional trade, boosting our economy and increasing wages across the UK, while eliminating tariffs on 100% of UK exports.