

UK lawyers gain big wins from Australia Trade Deal

UK legal services are set to enjoy an export boost thanks to guarantees in the UK-Australia trade deal that make it easier for British lawyers to practise in Australia.

Almost £85 million worth of legal services were exported to Australia in 2019 and the landmark deal, agreed in principle between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison in June, removes barriers for businesses and makes it easier for people to travel and work together.

Under the deal, which is set to be signed in the next few months, British lawyers can continue to provide UK and international legal services in Australia using their existing qualifications with more clarity and certainty. This will include arbitration, conciliation and mediation services.

New provisions will also support regulators on both sides to address obstacles and remove red tape make it easier for lawyers to get the necessary licences to practise. This means that those looking to requalify in Australian domestic law might face fewer barriers in what is already a costly and time-consuming process that involves having to sit up to 11 exams.

Legal services are a major industry in the UK contributing £22bn to the economy, and employing around 350,000 people who could take advantage of the legal wins in the trade deal.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

Our trade deal with Australia is a big win for our world-leading legal services industry, allowing them to practise down under more easily, with more certainty and support.

This deal will reduce barriers to trade, make it easier for our people to travel and work together, and will bring big benefits to our consumers and businesses.

Junior lawyers wanting to gain work experience in Australia will also benefit from easier access to Australia's Working Holiday Maker Visa, with eligibility increased from 30 years up to those 35 years old.

International law firm Herbert Smith Freehills, which merged UK and Australian firms in 2012 and employs 3,500 across both countries, is one of the many companies to benefit from the deal.

Rebecca Maslen-Stannage, Chair and Senior Partner, Herbert Smith Freehills

said:

Leading multinational law firms such as Herbert Smith Freehills, with major operations in both countries, are looking for certainty on mobility and RPQ provisions relating to the legal profession. We are delighted that the UK and Australian governments have included these provisions which will help us to work more easily across regions.

Law Society of England and Wales President, I. Stephanie Boyce said:

The FTA establishes and drives collaboration between the relevant bodies with the aim of addressing remaining barriers to practise as a local lawyer in the other country's territory.

We now look forward to taking new steps to facilitating international business with our colleagues in Australia. While the final agreement is yet to come, these commitments are a step in the right direction for both our legal professions and we will continue to seek the best deal for members in these discussions.

The UK's world leading services industry will benefit from better access through new digital and services provisions in this deal. Alongside the new investment provisions these arrangements will bring new opportunities to the whole of the country.

A Free Trade Agreement with Australia is also a gateway into the fast-growing Indo-Pacific region and will boost our bid to join CPTPP, one of the largest free trade areas in the world, covering £9 trillion of GDP and 11 Pacific nations from Australia to Mexico.