

India-UK Joint Statement on the JETCO

1. We, Piyush Ved Prakash Goyal, Honourable Minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs & Food & Public Distribution and Textiles, and the Rt. Honourable Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, Secretary of State for International Trade, met on 13 January 2022 for the 15th meeting of the India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO).

2. At this meeting, we recalled our Prime Ministers' commitment to a new and transformational Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the UK and India, rooted in our shared values of democracy, fundamental freedoms and rule of law, as reflected in the ambitious 2030 Roadmap for future UK-India relations launched in May 2021. Our vision is for revitalised and dynamic connections between our people; re-energised and deeper trade, investment and technological collaboration that improves the lives and livelihoods of our citizens; enhanced defence and security cooperation that promotes peace and prosperity around the world and India-UK leadership in climate, clean energy and health that acts as a global force for good as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. We reiterated the commitments made by our Prime Ministers as we launched our Enhanced Trade Partnership as part of the 2030 Roadmap, including the commitment to more than doubling the value of UK-India trade by 2030.

FTA

4. We welcomed the launch of UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations on 13 January and looked forward to the first round of negotiations taking place on 17 January. We committed to concluding negotiations on a comprehensive and balanced FTA, with the ambition to close negotiations by the end of 2022, including consideration of an Interim Trade Agreement to achieve early gains. We recognised that launch of the FTA marks a new phase in our strategic and trade relationship, delivering gains for both countries whilst building upon the bilateral commitments we have made to date. The link to the Joint Media Statement for the UK-India FTA launch can be found [here](#).

5. We thank those who contributed towards the public consultation for the FTA on both sides and will continue to consult the views of businesses and relevant stakeholders as we progress towards a comprehensive and balanced FTA which delivers for businesses in a range of sectors.

Market Access

6. We welcomed the delivery of the market access package of our Enhanced Trade Partnership which will unlock immediate gains for British and Indian businesses. In particular, we looked forward to the first shipment of apples and medical devices into India and welcomed the listing of 56 new Indian fisheries establishments.

7. As two services-driven economies, we celebrated the continued close cooperation in the services sector including the upcoming session of the legal services committee, progress on the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications, and the agreement by the new Taskforce on Healthcare Workforce of the key ambitions of a framework for cooperation. We also welcomed the first meeting of the joint dialogue on social security and the conclusion of the MoU on the Mutual Recognition of Seafarers' Certificates of Competency.

Wider cooperation

8. Both sides recognised the importance of a continued response against Covid-19, and the significance of UK-India cooperation in supporting the global effort to reduce the impact of the pandemic and to drive forward economic recovery. We appreciated the ongoing collaboration between Oxford University, AstraZeneca, and the Serum Institute of India in supporting the global vaccination drive.

9. We committed to building on progress made at COP26 where our Prime Ministers discussed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in areas like adaptation and climate resilience, green hydrogen, renewables and clean technology. Through our relationship we will work together to drive the transition to a more sustainable global economy, while delivering economic benefits for both countries.

10. As efforts continue to build back from Covid-19, both sides underlined the importance of bilateral investment to boost mutual growth and prosperity. Over the last 5 years, Indian firms have raised £13.41 billion in masala, dollar and green bonds listed on the London Stock Exchange. We welcomed recent reforms, including changes to retrospective taxation, by the Government of India. These positive changes are expected to protect consumer interests, reduce regulatory burdens and boost international investor confidence. The UK also welcomes India's decision to lift the Foreign Direct Investment cap in the insurance sector from 49% to 74% and remove the 'Indian ownership and control' requirements.

11. The UK congratulated India on the election of Invest India as the President of the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) for 2021-2023. We welcome India's Presidency and their future work in promoting and developing understanding and cooperation between Investment Promotion Agencies (IPAs). Having already worked with Invest India through the UK-India Fast Track Mechanism, we look forward to enhancing this relationship and working collaboratively to promote investment to India.

12. Both sides recognised the growing importance and high potential of cooperation in digital trade and tech and encouraged swift progress in concluding a Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. Establishing a Joint Working Group under the JDI and facilitating a ministerial level dialogue will deepen UK-India cooperation on digital and tech, including supporting collaboration on emerging tech.

13. We noted the visit of the Carrier Strike Group (CSG) to Mumbai in October 2021, supporting and strengthening defence and security ties between our two countries and welcomed efforts for co-development and co-production of key military technologies harnessing the strengths of Indian and British defence industries.

14. Both sides recognised the vital role Intellectual Property (IP) plays as a driver for economic growth and global trade and welcomed the ongoing engagement under the UK-India MoU on IP, which is now delivering results. We will continue to work in partnership to develop and strengthen the positive impact of a strong, reliable environment that supports, rewards and protects innovation and creativity and acknowledges the increasing importance of IP in UK-India bilateral trade.

Multilateral trading system

15. We have made significant strides in the multilateral space this year, engaging through a series of bilateral and multilateral fora. On 7 October 2021, both sides met for the Fourth UK-India Multilateral Trade Dialogue (MTD), to build mutual understanding and cooperation between our respective capitals and to deliver on the agreement made under the Prime Ministers' 2030 Roadmap to continue strengthening cooperation at the World Trade Organization (WTO). We welcomed continued and regular dialogues in the future, including the fifth MTD this year and setting up of thematic sub-groups in areas of mutual interest under the overarching Dialogue. Both sides will continue their co-operation at the WTO to progress on our shared goals and continue to restore confidence and trust in the multilateral system.

16. We welcomed progress following our meeting at the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial meeting in Sorrento on 12 October 2021. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to free and fair trade and to working with all WTO Members to undertake the necessary reform of the organisation while increasing our pandemic and disaster preparedness. We agreed to explore establishing a Track 1.5 dialogue to promote exchanges between academia, think-tanks and businesses on both sides over 2022 to 23 and beyond.

17. The UK and India appreciated the Director General for her inspiring leadership as well as the endeavours of the WTO Secretariat during preparation for the 12th Ministerial Conference. We will continue to engage on all key negotiations whilst we await confirmation of a new date and are determined to see the WTO fit to meet the challenges of the 2020s.

Next JETCO meeting

18. We agreed that the next meeting of the JETCO would take place in London to mark the progress made towards a Free Trade Agreement and to celebrate achievements across the breadth of the trade, economic and investment relationship.

Scientists are a step closer to finding planets like Earth

The UK Space Agency has invested £25 million in innovative science for the European Space Agency mission, called Planetary Transits and Oscillations of stars (PLATO), ensuring UK scientists and engineers, led by the University of Warwick, will take part in all aspects of the mission.

Caroline Harper, Head of Space Science at the UK Space Agency, said:

The critical milestone review has confirmed the maturity of the design and the robustness of the build schedule for both the science instruments and the spacecraft they will fly on, so it is now full speed ahead for PLATO.

The mission offers the exciting potential for a rocky planet with life signatures to be detected using innovative sensors, electronics and software developed in the UK, on a mission with UK science leadership.

Planned to launch in 2026, the next-generation planet hunting mission will monitor thousands of relatively bright stars over a large area of the sky, searching for tiny, regular dips in brightness as their planets transit in front of them, temporarily blocking out a small fraction of the starlight. The analysis of these transits and of the variations in the starlight will allow us to characterise the properties of the exoplanets and their host stars.

Astronomers have so far found over 3,000 planets beyond our Solar System which are called exoplanets, but none, as yet, has been shown to be truly Earth-like in terms of its size and distance from a Sun similar to our own. PLATO's innovative design is set to change all that.

Its suite of 26 small telescopes and cameras, reminiscent of the compound eye of an insect, will allow it to 'stare' at a large number of the nearest and brightest stars, with the aim of discovering Earth-sized planets orbiting Sun-like stars in the 'habitable zone' – the distance from the star where liquid water could exist at the surface.

PLATO optical bench entering the Large Space Simulator (ESTEC) for the thermos-elastic deformation test (TED) in September 2021. Credit: ESA

Professor Don Pollacco, from the University of Warwick, which leads the PLATO Science Management Consortium, said:

The PLATO project involves the serial production of complicated components and is challenging to both academia and industry. The Critical Milestone is a detailed examination of how these processes will work in practice.

Any production errors will lead to greater costs and delays so passing this milestone is reaffirming confidence in the hundreds of scientists and engineers that are working on this mission. Our dream of finding lots of planets like the Earth that we can examine in detail is one step closer.

The UK has a major role in many aspects of the mission. In addition to Warwick's involvement, scientists and engineers at UCL's Mullard Space Science Laboratory are responsible for the development of the camera electronics for the telescopes. The detectors are produced by Teledyne e2v in Chelmsford, and a team of UK scientists coordinated by Cambridge University's Institute of Astronomy is developing the Exoplanet Analysis data processing system.

Filippo Marliani, project manager of PLATO at ESA, said:

Plato continues a European tradition of excellence in all areas of space science. The mission will serve the science community to gather invaluable knowledge of planets in our galaxy, beyond our own Solar System.

The successful completion of the critical milestone and the formal start of the second phase of this extraordinary mission constitute an important boost of positive energy for the next challenges to be tackled with our industrial, institutional and academic partners.

The next major milestone for PLATO is the spacecraft critical design review in 2023, which will verify the detailed design of the complete spacecraft before proceeding with its assembly. After launch, PLATO will travel to Lagrange point 2 in space, 1.5 million km beyond Earth in the direction away from the Sun. From this point the telescope will observe more than 200 000 stars during its four-year nominal mission

The government's [National Space Strategy](#) outlines the long-term plans to grow the UK space sector and make Britain a science and technology superpower, expanding our horizons with space science and exploration missions like PLATO.

Emergency pesticide authorisation approved to protect sugar beet if specific conditions are met

Defra has today [approved an emergency temporary authorisation](#) for the use of a neonicotinoid pesticide treatment on the 2022 sugar beet crop due to the risk to the crop from yellows viruses.

Emerging sugar beet seedlings are vulnerable to predation by aphids which have the potential to spread beet yellows virus. Sugar beet crops have been severely affected, with 2020 yields down by a quarter on previous years. Other pesticide and organic treatments are not sufficiently effective in controlling viruses.

63% of the UK's sugar comes from domestic production of sugar beet which could be at risk if a significant amount of the national crop is infected. The strictly time limited emergency authorisation of this neonicotinoid treatment – Syngenta's Cruiser SB – will provide emergency protection against this virus, which could significantly impact yields of the sugar beet crop while the beet industry develops alternative solutions. Its exceptional temporary use will be tightly controlled and only permitted in very specific circumstances when strict requirements are met.

The maximum amount of treatment approved for use is 6% of the quantity of active substance applied on a range of crops in 2016 before neonicotinoids were prohibited.

Conditions of the authorisation include reduced application rate as well as a prohibition on any flowering crop being planted in the same field where the product has been used within 32 months of a treated sugar beet crop.

There will be an initial threshold for use, meaning that seed treatment will only be used if the predicted level of virus is at or above 19% of the national crop according to independent modelling. If the virus threshold is not met then the neonicotinoid treated seed will not be used – as was the case at the start of 2021 when this step was last taken.

12 EU countries – with significant sugar production – including France, Belgium, Denmark and Spain have granted emergency authorisations in the last three years for neonicotinoid seed treatments following the EU-wide ban – backed by the UK – coming into force.

The UK's approach to the use of emergency authorisations has not changed as a result of the UK's exit from the EU, and is in line with the approach taken across Europe. The UK's work to harness advancements in scientific research including through gene editing will also help to develop crops that are more resistant to aphids and other pests.

A Defra spokesperson said:

This decision has not been taken lightly and is based on robust scientific assessment. We evaluate the risks very carefully and only grant temporary emergency authorisations for restricted pesticides in special circumstances when strict requirements are met.

Last year the threshold was not met so the authorisation was never exercised. Strict criteria remain in place meaning this authorisation will only be used if necessary.

Minister for Asia visits Thailand to discuss trade and security ties and welcome UK vaccine cooperation



Minister for Asia, Amanda Milling, has concluded her visit to Southeast Asia with a 3-day tour of Thailand.

Meeting Vice Foreign Minister Vijavat, Minister Milling spoke about boosting economic, digital and technology ties between the UK and Thailand as well as working together on shared interests such as recovering from COVID-19 and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Minister for Asia Amanda Milling said:

We are committed to boosting our cooperation with Thailand across the board, including on trade and investment, technology and sustainable development, as well as through our political dialogue.

As security partners, the UK and Thailand also need to work side-by-side to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, and to tackle major regional challenges.

With a current trading relationship in excess of £4.7 billion and more than 5,000 British businesses exporting to Thailand, the minister also focused her visit on forging new economic links between the UK and Thailand.

This included the offer of honest, reliable infrastructure finance by the new British International Investment group and hosting a roundtable with major businesses working in the region.

The minister also discussed UK-Thailand collaboration on energy and infrastructure in a meeting with Minister of Energy Supattanapong Punmeechaow and visited Siam Biosciences, which is the regional production plant for AstraZeneca's ground-breaking COVID vaccine, saving lives and aiding the COVID recovery.

Also on the agenda was the ongoing situation in Myanmar, in particular strengthening the provision of humanitarian relief and supporting international efforts to resolve the crisis. The UK has already provided humanitarian assistance to over half a million people since the coup almost a year ago.

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1. 17 January 2022

Added translation

2. 17 January 2022

Added translation

3. 14 January 2022

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[Reforms to encourage more students to take up language GCSEs](#)

Students will study reformed language GCSEs from 2024, following government changes to make the subjects more accessible and attractive for students, and boost take up by making it clearer what they need to know.

Following [a public consultation](#), the Department for Education has today (14 January) [confirmed changes](#) to French, German and Spanish GCSEs, supported by a [research review](#) by Ofsted, to help students build confidence and excel in learning languages.

In the updated GCSEs, students will be assessed on the most common vocabulary used in conversations and writing, as well as grammar and pronunciation, increasing clarity for teachers and improving the practical benefits for students.

Research shows that a focus on these 'building blocks' enables students to more clearly see progress in their ability to understand and use the language, and in turn grow in confidence and motivation.

The changes aim to fulfil the government's ambition for 90% of Year 10 pupils to study EBacc subjects for GCSE by September 2025. So far, over 95% of students have been entered for GCSE English, maths and science and over 80% in humanities subjects, and the government wants to increase the number of students studying language GCSEs too.

The consultation was based on recommendations from an expert panel chaired by Ian Bauckham and received 1,644 responses, with the majority from language teachers agreeing with the proposals. The plans for the new French, German and Spanish GCSEs reflect sector feedback, giving exam boards an additional year to develop them.

Schools Minister Robin Walker said:

Studying languages opens up a world of new, exciting opportunities for people and is hugely important for a modern global economy.

That's why we want more young people to take up modern language GCSEs, and these evidence-based changes aim to do just that – making these qualifications more well-rounded and accessible, and helping more young people to enjoy learning languages.

The revised GCSEs will start to be taught in September 2024, with first exams being held in 2026. The changes to the language GCSEs include:

- Students will be assessed on the basis of 1,200 'word families' at foundation tier GCSE and 1,700 'word families' in higher tier GCSE. An example of a word family could be 'manage', 'managed' and 'manages'
- Exam boards will select topics and themes to inform the selection of key vocabulary, as opposed being prescribed in the subject content
- At least 85 per cent of the 'word families' will be selected from the 2,000 most frequently occurring words in a language to make sure students have a good knowledge of the most common words

Ofqual has also confirmed the assessment approach today, following a public consultation, which sets out the revised assessment objectives and confirms that the current use of tiered assessments and non-exam assessment (NEA) will continue. Ofqual will now conduct a public technical consultation on the details of assessment requirements and then exam boards will develop GCSE specifications, ready to be taught from September 2024.