

# Business Secretary chairs Build Back Better Business Council meeting

News story

Final meeting between government and business representatives in Build Back Better Business Council.



The Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng chaired the final meeting of the Build Back Better Business Council yesterday afternoon (8 December 2021), alongside Andrew McCosh from the government's Office for Science and Technology.

Speaking to the council of UK business leaders, the Business Secretary acknowledged the efforts of businesses and provided an update on the emergent situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Andrew McCosh from the Office for Science and Technology Strategy team then presented to business leaders, inviting them to join the government in leading the global technological revolution. He said that the key to this was government support to turn creative ideas into innovative and disruptive start-ups, and unlocking domestic investment. He also added a number of measures the government is taking, including reforming investment rules to favour founders and adjusting Visa rules to enable the UK to attract top science and technology talent from around the world.

In response to this, the group welcomed the creation of the Office and commented that the principal challenge was revising rules on scale-up capital to unlock future business growth. They also added the need to close the gap on certain new technologies including renewables, nuclear energy, 5G and technology adoption, with some UK businesses lagging behind international competitors.

The meeting concluded by noting the success of the Council as a productive forum for communication between business and government. The Business Secretary thanked attendees on behalf of the Prime Minister.

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# UK agrees historic digital trade deal with Singapore

- International Trade Secretary secures agreement in principle on a digital trade deal with Singapore.
- The Digital Economy Agreement (DEA) – the world’s most comprehensive digital trade agreement – will capitalise on our strengths as the world’s second largest services exporter and leading digital hub.
- More opportunities for UK and Singapore firms to target advanced, tech savvy and rapidly expanding markets in Asia and the UK.

The UK has today (Thursday, December 9) secured an agreement in principle with Singapore for a Digital Economy Agreement (DEA) that will cut costs, slash red tape and pave the way for a new era of trade between both nations and the wider region.

It is the first digitally-focused trade agreement ever signed by a European nation. This comprehensive digital trade deal was agreed in record time by International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan and Singapore Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations S. Iswaran.

The DEA will take our trading relationship with Singapore – worth £16 billion in 2020 – to the next level by overhauling outdated trade rules that affect both goods and services exporters, making it easier for businesses to target new opportunities and build mutual prosperity in Singapore and the UK.

A third of UK exports to Singapore are already digitally delivered, and this deal will create new opportunities to expand digital trade. Services companies will be the big winners, from financial and telecoms giants like Standard Chartered or BT Group to software companies like Wales-based Awen Collective.

Singaporean businesses are welcome to invest and expand into the UK, the third largest tech sector in the world by venture capital investment. It is also a magnet for global talent and investment, with the third largest number of decacorns in the world after the US and China.

UK-founded tech unicorns are being created at a rate of almost one a week, and more will now be able to follow in the footsteps of companies like Revolut, Darktrace and Checkout.com who are already thriving in Singapore. Goods exporters will also benefit from streamlining border processes, while time-consuming and costly paperwork will be replaced with e-

signatures, e-contracts and electronic payments.

Singapore is a gateway to the wider Indo-Pacific region and the DEA represents deepening trade ties as the UK looks to join Singapore and 10 other nations in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Membership would mean access to a £8.4 trillion free trade area with vast opportunities for UK business.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

This cutting-edge agreement with Singapore links two of the world's most dynamic hi-tech hubs and plays to our strengths as pioneers in digital trade. Negotiated in just six months, it is the first digital trade deal ever signed by a European nation and will slash red tape, cut costs and support well-paid jobs across the whole UK.

Digital trade is creating a new global economy, but it is still largely governed by old-fashioned rules that pre-date the digital revolution of the past 20 years. We're using our independent trade policy to strike ground-breaking agreements that update these rules for the digital age and connect UK businesses to the biggest and fastest growing markets in the world.

The DEA is the latest and most ambitious digital trade win following new agreements with Japan, Australia and New Zealand that all contain advanced digital chapters. Under the UK's Presidency, G7 countries agreed on ground-breaking Digital Trade Principles in October, which will help to modernise trade and spread the benefits of technology more widely.

Wide-ranging benefits include closer links between two hi-tech and services hubs, modernised digital trade rules, and closer cooperation on industries of the future.

- The DEA links two of the world's most dynamic hi-tech and services hubs. It plays to our mutual strengths: UK as the second largest exporter of services, and Singapore as a tech-savvy nation at the heart of the booming ASEAN's digital economy. Singapore businesses are welcome to expand and invest in UK's flourishing tech sector – which has the third highest rate of VC investment globally.
- The deal is set to create modernised rules for businesses of all sizes and across all sectors. It secures free and trusted cross border data flows, removing unnecessary data localisation requirements in the future. The deal also promotes digital trading systems and locks in high-data protection standards, making digital trade cheaper, faster, and more secure.

- Future growth sectors like fintech, and lawtech can benefit from deep cooperation with another advanced economy – helping cement the UK’s position as a world leader in tech and a global services, digital and data hub.

Kara Owen, British High Commissioner to Singapore said:

I am delighted that the Digital Economy Agreement reached agreement in principle today. The UK is the first European nation to sign such a digitally-focused trade deal, and I am very proud we reached this milestone in just 6 months. 70% of our services exports to Singapore are already delivered digitally.

This ambitious deal will allow businesses to benefit from streamlined border processes and replacing costly paperwork with electronic contracts and payments. Not only does the DEA create a superhighway between UK and Asia, it also sets the standard for global digital trade rules.

Natalie Black, Her Majesty’s Trade Commissioner to Asia Pacific said:

The UK and Singapore have agreed the world’s most comprehensive digital trade deal. The next generation Digital Economy Agreement will provide modernised digital trade rules, remove barriers and help reduce costs for businesses. It is set to open a new era of digital trade across two of the world’s most digitally advanced countries. This ground-breaking model will also help the UK champion new trade opportunities in a regional digital economy projected to hit \$1trn over the next decade.

ENDS

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# Government extends consultation to help shape future Conversion Therapy legislation

- Consultation on legislation to ban Conversion Therapy is extended by eight weeks
- The step has been taken to ensure the widest possible views are taken into account.
- Minister for Equalities Mike Freer says: “I am confident that our proposals strike the correct balance to stamp out coercive conversion therapy, whilst protecting free speech.”

Building upon extensive engagement that has laid the foundations for proposals to ban conversion therapy and protect vulnerable individuals, Ministers have extended the deadline so that those who have not yet had the chance to respond can do so. Extending the consultation does not change our intent: as announced in the Queen’s speech in May, the Government will ban conversion therapy, and that ban will protect everyone. This has been our policy since 2018. The consultation will help ensure any legislation is proportionate and effective while protecting freedoms.

Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss, said:

“We are absolutely determined to stamp out conversion therapy, and want to hear all views on the best ways to do that.

“The consultation on our proposals has been extended by eight weeks, to ensure anyone who has not yet responded has the opportunity to do so.

“We are absolutely committed to a ban which will make sure LGBT people can live their lives free from the threat of harm or abuse, whilst protecting free speech as well as protecting under-18s from being channelled into a irreversible decisions about their future.”

Minister for Equalities Mike Freer said:

“We have listened and we have acted, to ensure that the full range of opinions are represented, and that everyone who wants to has a chance to comment on our proposals.

“The focus for the ban will be on those who actively seek to change someone’s sexuality or transgender status, with protection for young people a particular priority.

“We have already consulted extensively with faith leaders, clinicians, LGBT stakeholders, and other stakeholder groups, and I am confident that our proposals strike the correct balance to stamp out coercive conversion therapy, whilst protecting free speech.

“I urge everyone who has not yet done so to make their views known, so we can work together to stamp out this abhorrent practice for good.”

The consultation proposes to:

- target physical acts conducted in the name of conversion therapy by legislating to ensure this sinister motivation for violence is considered by the judge as a potential aggravating factor upon sentencing
- target talking conversion therapy with a new criminal offence where it is committed against under 18s under any circumstance, or committed against those aged 18 or over who have not given their informed consent, or due to their circumstances or vulnerability are unable to do so
- produce a holistic package of measures, such as Conversion Therapy Protection Orders, new support for victims, restricting promotion, removing profit streams, and strengthening the case for disqualification from holding a senior role in a charity.

Key Facts:

- Casual conversations and supportive conversations which do not pressure someone down one path or another, will not be in scope of our proposed legislation.
- Our legislation will not affect parents’ ability to raise their children with the values of their faith.
- Simply expressing the teachings of a religion or private prayer, will not constitute conversion therapy in our proposals – and we will continue to work with faith groups on the proposals.
- Clinical practitioners working in line with their professional obligations and within existing regulatory frameworks will not be affected by this legislation.

Further information:

The consultation will close 4 February 2022, in order to allow ample opportunity for those who are yet to respond to be able to do so and to take account of Christmas and New Year. It can be responded to here – <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/banning-conversion-therapy>

Concerns have been raised that the initial six week consultation period was not long enough for everyone with an interest to express their views on this important issue, particularly those who wished to access an Easy Read version of the consultation. Ministers have extended the deadline by eight weeks so those who have not yet had the chance to respond can do so.

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 allows for change of legal sex and we will not be amending this. The legislation we will put forward after this consultation will address conversion therapy only and will not in any way change the process by which people are able to change their legal sex.

The Government has a manifesto commitment to better combat harassment and violence against LGBT people and we remain committed to preparing legislation

for Spring 2022 and introducing this as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

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## [New rocket test facility under construction in Scotland](#)

Press release

The UK Space Agency welcomes the news that British company Orbex is constructing a state-of-the-art rocket test facility in Kinloss, Scotland.



Credit: Orbex.

Ian Annett, Deputy CEO of the UK Space Agency, said:

The construction of this new facility marks another major milestone in our ambitions to become a modern, agile spacefaring nation. Orbex is an innovative spaceflight company developing its own launch vehicle which will be tested at this new facility, before launching from Space Hub Sutherland.

This is a very exciting time for the UK space sector, as we look ahead to the first ever satellite launches from UK soil next year.

Orbex has commissioned Motive Offshore Group to develop the test launch platform, known as Orbex LP1, which will support the testing of Orbex's Prime rocket, designed to transport small satellites to low Earth orbit.

The UK Space Agency supported the development of Orbex's Prime Rocket with £5.5 million of funding, as part of the government's plans to enable small satellite launch from UK spaceports.

Although Orbex will operate its launches from Space Hub Sutherland, the test launch platform at Kinloss will allow for full 'dress rehearsals' of launch procedures.

Space Hub Sutherland is one of seven potential spaceport sites across the UK and is being developed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The spaceport is expected to generate around 60 jobs in Caithness and Sutherland, and a total of 250 jobs in the wider region.

[Find out more by visiting the Orbex website.](#)

[Find out more about LaunchUK – the UK's commercial spaceflight programme](#)

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## **Dye & Durham's purchase of TM Group could reduce competition**

Dye & Durham and TM Group both provide a one-stop property search service to clients in the property market under a variety of brands. Their customers include conveyancers, estate agents, and mortgage brokers, who use their services to order property search reports used in the process of real estate transactions in England and Wales.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has concerns that Dye & Durham's purchase of TM Group could lead to a reduction in competition, given these firms are two of just four large, independent businesses that provide these services across England and Wales. The CMA is concerned that this could lead to higher costs for conveyancers, estate agents and mortgage brokers, which could be passed on as higher fees for people and businesses buying or selling residential and commercial properties.

Unless these concerns are addressed by the companies, the merger will be subject to an in-depth investigation by the CMA.

Joel Bamford, CMA Senior Director, said:

Our investigation has found that Dye & Durham's purchase of TM Group could increase costs for people buying and selling their home.

Property searches are an essential part of the process of buying a home or property. By removing one of the few large, national companies offering this service, the deal could lead to higher fees for legal and real estate businesses, which would then be passed



onto house-buyers and businesses.

Unless the merging businesses can offer suitable ways to address these issues, we will move to conduct a more in-depth investigation

Canadian-based Dye & Durham has expanded globally over the last few years, into territories such as Australia and Ireland, as well as the United Kingdom. Since 2016, it has acquired 11 firms based in England and Wales, including PIE, PSG Connect, Index PI, York Place, Terrafirma and Future Climate Info, and one in Northern Ireland.

Dye & Durham now has 5 working days to submit proposals to address the CMA's competition concerns. If suitable proposals are not submitted, the deal will be referred for an in-depth investigation.

For more information, visit the [Dye & Durham/TM Group merger inquiry page](#).

1. The CMA initial enforcement order – which requires Dye & Durham and TM Group to operate as separate independent companies as they did before the acquisition in July 2021 – remains in force.