

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.

[PM meeting with Swedish Prime Minister](#)

Andersson: 11 May 2022

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson met with Swedish Prime Minister Andersson in Harpsund, Sweden.



The Prime Minister was welcomed to Harpsund by Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson today, to discuss long term security collaboration between the UK and Sweden.

The leaders agreed that the aftershocks of Putin's abhorrent invasion of Ukraine had fundamentally changed international security architecture. They underlined that relations with Putin could never be normalised.

The invasion had also sharpened the focus on European security, the Prime Minister said, adding that the United Kingdom deeply valued its already close defence and security relationship with Sweden.

The leaders discussed how British and Swedish forces could increase their military cooperation in the coming months, and the Prime Minister said he believed today's security declaration would not only bring them closer together but allow both forces to adapt to the challenges of tomorrow, side-by-side.

Sweden has advanced, cutting-edge military technology and world leading Armed Forces, and the closer collaboration between both countries will benefit wider Euro-Atlantic security, the Prime Minister added.

Speaking about energy security, the leaders discussed closer collaboration on renewables, including wind farm technology.

Both agreed to stay in close touch in the coming weeks and months.

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350,000 households supported to buy a home through Help to Buy

Press release

Over 350,000 young people and families have been helped into homeownership with Help to Buy since its launch in 2013.



Over 350,000 young people and families have been helped into homeownership with Help to Buy since its launch in 2013.

The major milestone was reached as the official Help to Buy statistics were published today (11 May 2022). The statistics show:

- 355,634 properties have been bought with a Help to Buy: Equity Loan since its launch.
- First-time buyers account for 83% of total purchases.
- The total value of Help to Buy: Equity Loan stands at £22 billion and the value of the properties sold under the scheme total £99 billion.

Housing Minister Stuart Andrew MP said:

Giving everyone the opportunity to own their own home is central to our levelling up mission – to spread opportunity and prosperity equally across the country.

It's fantastic that this milestone has been reached on the day we introduce our Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which sets out our plans to deliver more homes and give everyone the opportunity to own their own home.

Alongside other government initiatives such as the mortgage guarantee scheme, Help to Buy has boosted the annual number of first-time buyers to a 20 year high.

Chair of Homes England Peter Freeman said:

It's brilliant to see the impact that Help to Buy has had to date. With the help of the equity loan, more than 350,000 young people and families, many of which are first-time buyers, have now been able to buy their own home.

The new Help to Buy: Equity Loan for first time buyers started on 1 April 2021 and will continue to help thousands more people to own their home until March 2023.

Purchasers can borrow up to 20% of the cost of a new build (40% in London), funding the balance via a mortgage and repaying the loan when they sell.

Help to Buy is just one of the ways the government is making homeownership more achievable and affordable. Shared Ownership, First Homes and the Mortgage Guarantee Scheme are supporting many more people into homes of their own.

The mortgage guarantee scheme statistics also published today show 12,388 mortgages have been completed since the scheme's launch in April 2021 to 31 December 2021, with the total value of mortgage loans at £2.2 billion. The majority of mortgage completions under the scheme were outside London and the South East (86%) with the highest proportion of property completions in Scotland (24%) and North West (12%).

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[PM remarks at press conference in Sweden: 11 May 2022](#)

Thank you, Prime Minister Andersson, and thank you for having me to your absolutely beautiful Harpsund retreat. It's breath-taking. It's great to be back in Sweden, and to see you once again.

This week many of us have been paying tribute to the brave men and women who secured victory and peace in Europe 77 years ago.

And so it's a sad irony that we have been forced to discuss how best to fortify our shared defences against the empty conceit of a 21st century tyrant.

When Europe celebrated VE Day in 1945 – a victory that was of course in no small part ensured by the heroism of the Russian people – we hoped that peace

on our continent endure.

Well Putin's bloodthirsty campaign against a sovereign nation has put an end to that hope.

And we face a new reality.

But one that we face together.

Throughout this conflict, our Nordic partners have been leading international support, not just for Ukraine but also for European security.

From sending defensive weapons and equipment, to bringing together international partners and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us in the UN, the Human Rights Council and International Criminal Court.

The war in Ukraine is forcing us all to make difficult decisions.

But sovereign nations must be free to make those decisions without fear or influence or threat of retaliation.

So I am very pleased today, with you Prime Minister Andersson, to sign this mutual security assurances declaration.

It's an agreement that brings our two countries even closer together.

It will allow us to share more intelligence, bolster our military exercises and further our joint development of technology.

The many carcasses of Russian tanks that now litter the fields and streets of Ukraine thanks to Swedish-developed, British-built NLAWs certainly speak to how effective that co-operation can be. But most importantly, this is an agreement that enshrines the values that both Sweden and the UK hold dear, and which we will not hesitate to defend and, as you put it so well Magdalena, when we were out on the lake – we are now literally and metaphorically in the same boat.

[Insolvency Service transitions to regional hubs as part of efficiency drive](#)

News story

Over the next five years, the Insolvency Service is set to transition to regional centres, reducing the number of offices whilst maintaining high

standards of customer service and delivering better value for money.



To enhance value for money for the taxpayer whilst maintaining excellent customer service, the Insolvency Service has announced plans to reduce its number of offices across England from 22 to 11 Regional Centres, in addition to maintaining its existing offices in Cardiff and Edinburgh.

Currently, the Insolvency Service operates from 22 different office locations across England, Wales and Scotland.

Over the next five years, the agency's smaller offices will be consolidated into larger existing offices. The move to regional centres will deliver savings of more than £20 million over the next 10 years, enabling improved collaboration and better utilisation of office space.

The Insolvency Service will continue to operate from Scotland, Wales, and each of England's regions. The agency will look to reinvest savings into improved online facilities, making the agency's services more customer focused, efficient and accessible.

The 11 existing offices which will become Regional Centres are:

- Birmingham
- Cardiff
- Croydon
- Edinburgh
- Exeter
- Ipswich
- Leeds
- London
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Nottingham

Chief Executive of the Insolvency Service, Dean Beale, said:

This is an exciting development which will see us become a more modern and streamlined organisation in the right locations for our customers, enabling us to better meet their needs.

As well as supporting the government's effort to help the country build back better from the pandemic, we will be able to focus on improving our services while delivering best value for money for taxpayers.

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