

UK kickstarts work on new trade deal with Switzerland

- UK working to negotiate new enhanced free trade agreement with fellow 'services superpower' Switzerland
- Government launches eight-week consultation on new UK-Swiss FTA to seek views of UK businesses and public and shape negotiating objectives
- New deal will take our relationship to the next level in industries of the future such as digital trade and innovative services

The UK has today (28 April 2022) kickstarted work for a new enhanced trade deal with Switzerland, after Prime Minister Boris Johnson hosted Swiss President Ignazio Cassis for bilateral talks in London.

The enhanced deal aims to boost two-way trade between two of the world's biggest services superpowers through measures including breaking down barriers and opening up access for U.K. firms to the Swiss market.

The Department for International Trade is launching an eight-week consultation calling on businesses and the public for their views ahead of the start of negotiations.

Switzerland is already an important partner for the UK, with bilateral trade worth nearly £35 billion annually. Many UK businesses benefit from tariff free trade on most goods under our existing trade agreement rolled over from the EU, but the current deal does not cover services, which account for over half of our bilateral relationship.

As two services powerhouses globally renowned for their expertise, both the UK and Switzerland are keen to negotiate an ambitious, unprecedented free trade agreement that will boost both our economies and show the world what is possible between two like-minded and innovative democracies.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

A new enhanced trade agreement with Switzerland is a huge opportunity to liberalise trade with our 10th largest trading partner and unlock new opportunities for our world-leading services sector.

As two services superpowers, we have a huge opportunity to negotiate a modern, ambitious, unprecedented deal that will boost both our economies and show the world what is possible between two like-minded and innovative nations who are firmly within Europe but outside of the EU.

In 2020, the United Kingdom was the second-largest exporter of services to

the world, with exports worth £266.8 billion. Switzerland was 12th largest, with £89.6 billion.

This deal will help take our relationship to the next level in industries of the future such as digital trade, innovative services, and green growth – delivering higher-paying jobs across the country. It will support trade in vital industries of the UK economy, including finance, legal services, consultancy, the tech sector, and the creative industries, helping contribute to setting new rules and standards for digital trade in the 21st century.

CBI President Lord Bilimoria said:

That DIT is seeking inputs into enhancing the UK-Swiss FTA is to be welcomed, and the CBI looks forward to responding. The CBI-driven Joint UK-Swiss Bilateral Trade & Investment Council launched earlier this year identified significant opportunities to deepen the existing trading relationship, primarily by enhancing digital and services trade.

Alongside the ongoing dialogue on Financial Services, this consultation presents an opportunity to increase cooperation on issues ranging from customs, reducing complexity in short-term mobility and building cooperation on innovation through our world-class research institutions.

Managing Director, International Trade and Investment, TheCityUK Nicola Watkinson said:

As the first and third largest net exporters of financial and related professional services globally, the UK and Switzerland have a great deal to gain by setting a new gold standard for services trade between two sovereign nations.

In the UK, nearly half of these exports are generated outside London, in towns and cities right across the UK, so making progress with this agreement can deliver real benefits to local jobs and prosperity. In the long term, a free trade deal with Switzerland will complement wider progress towards mutual recognition, and can be used as the model for new-generation trade deals with other partners worldwide.

Background:

*[The consultation can be accessed on the gov.uk website.](#)

Strict controls on pine and cedar tree imports into Great Britain implemented

Emergency legislation restricting the movement of pine and cedar trees into Great Britain to help protect against the imminent threat of the tree pest Pine Processionary Moth has been announced today (Thursday 28 April).

Pine Processionary Moth is present in North Africa and Southern Europe, in particular in Italy. It has also recently been spreading northwards through France. As a result of this legislation, it will no longer be possible to import pine and cedar trees grown in countries where Pine Processionary Moth is established, such as Italy and France. Exceptions apply in cases where Pest Free Areas are designated, or where the trees have been grown under complete physical protection for their lifetime.

The new regulation, in the form of a Statutory Instrument, will strengthen requirements for the import of pine and cedar trees into Great Britain from Friday 29 April. The bolstered measures will only permit imports of these species, both of which are host species of Pine Processionary Moth, from:

- Countries officially confirmed by the National Plant Protection Organisation as free of Pine Processionary Moth;
- Officially designated pest-free areas;
- Nurseries where the trees have been grown under complete physical protection for their lifetime.

The controls apply to all businesses which import living plants and their constituent parts, including live plant foliage and plants for planting, into Great Britain. The restrictions do not apply to processed plant products, such as timber, wood chips and packaging materials.

This action comes following the confirmed interception of Pine Processionary Moth on a small number of pine trees at tree nurseries in England and Wales, imported from France in February this year. Pine Processionary Moth larvae and caterpillars can cause significant damage to pine and other conifer tree species, and pose a risk to human and animal health.

Professor Nicola Spence, UK Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

We have taken authoritative and immediate action to protect tree nurseries and the wider natural environment from the imminent threat of Pine Processionary Moth.

The increasingly globalised plant trade, along with climate change, continue to present new and emerging risks from pests and diseases. Strengthening our rigorous standards of biosecurity – already among the highest in Europe – will both minimise the net potential losses to our existing treescapes and serve to realise our long-term vision for the nation's trees and woodlands.

Across Great Britain, rapid and robust plant health enforcement action has taken place to prevent the spread of Pine Processionary Moth into the wider environment. The infested trees at the affected nurseries were swiftly contained and destroyed, whilst tracing work to identify other consignments that may be affected is ongoing. Although there is no evidence of pest spread into the environment, increased surveillance and pheromone trapping will be carried out over the summer as a precautionary monitoring measure.

Healthy trees and plants benefit people, the environment, and the economy. Protecting the long-term welfare of our treescapes will underpin Government efforts to treble tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament and plant 30,000 hectares of trees across the UK per year by 2025, as well as form part of wider efforts to achieve Net Zero by 2050.

[VetPartners' purchase of Goddard raises competition concerns](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) opened its investigation into VetPartners Limited's purchase of Goddard Holdco Limited, which trades as Goddard Veterinary Group, in March 2022. Both firms are providers of veterinary services. VetPartners, owned by the private equity firm BC Partners, operates approximately 550 sites across the UK, while Goddard, a family-owned business, operates 47 sites in Greater London.

As with the CMA's [recent investigation into CVS's purchase of The Vet](#), this deal takes place against a backdrop of a small number of corporate groups, including VetPartners, buying up large numbers of independent practices and local chains of vets across the UK. The CMA has received a number of complaints in recent years about higher prices or lower quality services as a result of multiple vets' practices in the same local area being owned by a single company. VetPartners, like most of these corporate groups, not only owns and operates local vet practices, but also has broader activities within the veterinary sector, owning other businesses including diagnostic laboratories, locum agencies, and crematoria.

Following its Phase 1 investigation into VetPartners' acquisition of Goddard, the CMA has found that the merger raises competition concerns in 11 local areas across Greater London.

The CMA's investigation found that the combined businesses would account for a significant proportion of veterinary services in each of these areas. While veterinary practices owned by VetPartners and Goddard currently compete for customers at each of these locations, the CMA is concerned that the combined businesses would not face sufficient competition after the merger. This could lead to pet owners facing a worse quality of service, including more limited treatment options, or having to pay higher prices.

Colin Raftery, Senior Director of Mergers, at the CMA, said:

Close to 60% of UK households own a pet and, when veterinary care is needed, the cost of care can have a significant impact on already-stretched household budgets.

Like CVS's recent acquisition of The Vet, VetPartners' acquisition of Goddard would result in too many vets' practices in the same area being under the control of a single company, raising the risk of higher prices or lower quality services.

Unless our concerns are addressed, we will refer this deal for an in-depth investigation to ensure that pet owners don't lose out.

VetPartners has 5 working days to offer legally-binding proposals to the CMA to address the competition concerns identified. The CMA would then have a further 5 working days to consider whether to accept these instead of referring the case to a Phase 2 investigation.

For more information, visit the [VetPartners / Goddard merger inquiry case page](#).

Notes to Editors

1. VetPartners refers to VetPartners Limited, and Goddard refers to Goddard Holdco Limited, which trades as Goddard Veterinary Group.
2. Following a Phase 1 review, the CMA has found that VetPartners' acquisition of Goddard gives rise to a realistic prospect of a substantial lessening of competition (SLC) in the local areas around 11 practices acquired by VetPartners, all located in Greater London, primarily in the north-east London area.
3. The information available to the CMA indicates that the combined businesses of the VetPartners and Goddard would provide more than 30% of all veterinary services in each of these 11 local areas.
4. The CMA served an initial enforcement order in November 2021 requiring the companies to operate independently, as they did before the purchase. The order remains in force. Details of the order can be found on the [VetPartners / Goddard merger inquiry case page](#).
5. The CMA's investigation focused on the provision of commercial veterinary services to small animals (including cats, dogs and other pets), and excluded services for equine and farm animals (horses and livestock); the CMA's investigation also excluded out of hours services, referral services, home visit and telemedicine vets, as well as non-commercial practices in the market, such as charities.
6. The Pet Food Manufacturer's Association found in its [2021 Pet Population report](#) that 17 million UK households had pets, accounting for approximately 59% of UK households.
7. [ONS data](#) suggests that in the year leading up to July 2021 consumer spending on vets and other services for pets was over £4 billion.
8. This is the second recent merger involving veterinary practices in which

the CMA has identified competition concerns. The CMA [found competition concerns](#) following CVS's purchase of The Vet in February 2022. CVS has since offered to sell all of The Vet practices it bought to address the CMA's concerns. The CMA is currently considering whether this offer would address the concerns identified in that case.

9. All media enquiries should be directed to the CMA press office by email on press@cma.gov.uk, or by phone on 020 3738 6460.

[Civil Service to deliver thousands of high quality apprenticeships across the UK](#)

One in twenty civil servants will be an apprentice by 2025, under new plans that will diversify the pipeline of talent into government and spread Civil Service jobs across the country to level up opportunity.

More than 35,000 apprentices have been recruited since 2015, exceeding the government's manifesto commitment and establishing the Civil Service as a leading provider of apprenticeships. The new strategy will build on this by committing to 5% of the UK Home Civil Service being apprentices by 2025.

The schemes offer people across the UK a route into employment, with a programme of industry-leading training and opportunities for secondment in the private sector equipping apprentices with highly-recruitable skills.

New targets will also bring government closer to the communities it serves than ever before, capitalising on the creation of local hubs to ensure the number of apprenticeship roles in every region reflects local Civil Service workforce numbers. This forms part of the concerted shift of government focus and resources to Britain's forgotten communities throughout the 2020s. .

An advertising campaign blitz and the promise to harness new initiatives like T-Level work placements will also help ensure at least 39% of apprenticeships are taken up by people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the Social Mobility Commission benchmark, ensuring the opportunity to work in government is open to everyone.

Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office, Minister Wheeler said:

With more than 35,000 apprenticeship starts in the Civil Service since 2015, it's clear that the door is well and truly open for anyone to get in and get on in government.

The new apprenticeship strategy contains a relentless focus on

driving up standards in government, building a pipeline of highly-skilled public servants from across the UK to deliver on the people's priorities.

Not only will this improve the quality of public service in the long term, it is also putting young people at the forefront of the government's work to level up the country.

Leon Soyinka Sinden, a current apprentice who has worked across a range of communications teams in the Cabinet Office, said a Civil Service apprenticeship had set him up for success:

Going straight from school to the heart of government is daunting at first, but it's given me so much confidence in myself.

After only 4 months, I've had so many incredible experiences and opportunities – working on large scale national projects at this stage in my career is a privilege. I know I'll leave this apprenticeship with the skills needed to have an amazing career.

The new strategy is just one of several steps the government has taken to grow the number of apprenticeship opportunities offered in the UK, including offering cash incentives to support employers to create new apprenticeship opportunities and creating the new Flexi-Job Apprenticeship scheme.

[Read the Civil Service Apprenticeships Strategy 2022 to 2025.](#)

[Hawker Sea Fury T Mk 20, G-RNHF, Anniversary Statement](#)

News story

Forced landing after engine failed on base leg, approx 0.5 nm from Runway 04, RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset, 28 April 2021.



This statement provides an update on the ongoing AAIB investigation into an accident involving Hawker Sea Fury T Mk 20, G-RNHF, 0.5 nm from Runway 04, RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset on 28 April 2021.

The aircraft was being positioned for a landing on Runway 04 at RNAS Yeovilton following a low engine oil pressure indication. As the aircraft began the base turn, the engine seized suddenly and the pilot was unable to feather the propeller. Due to the extremely high rate of descent required to maintain speed it was not possible to reach the runway. The aircraft struck the ground approximately 0.5 nm from the runway threshold. The aircraft was destroyed but both occupants were able to extract themselves from the cockpit.

The investigation has identified that the engine's rear crankpin bearing had overheated, leading to extensive damage within the rear crankcase and causing the engine to seize. Due to the severe damage to the engine, the cause of the rear crankpin bearing becoming overheated was not established. The final report into the accident is expected to be published in June 2022.

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