

23 June 2020

House of Commons Public Bill Committee on the Trade Bill 2019-21
By Email

Dear Committee members,

The British Chambers of Commerce, and our Accredited network of UK and overseas Chambers, plays a key role in trade promotion, facilitation and in driving inward investment. Accredited Chambers of Commerce are also the only UK business representative organisation intimately involved in the mechanics of international trade on a day-to-day basis. By certifying the origin of goods, Chambers help to reduce the possibility that overseas customs authorities stop British shipments – helping to ensure the smooth passage of UK goods across international borders. We welcome the opportunity to provide our observations to the Committee on the Trade Bill.

This Bill is crucial to the UK's ability to prosper as a global trading nation. Regardless of the outcome of the pending negotiations, the British Chambers of Commerce Network – both in the UK and around the world – remains committed to supporting firms to adapt and thrive in future.

The Government describes the Bill as containing “... key measures that will deliver for UK businesses and consumers across the UK, providing continuity and certainty as we take action to build a country that is more outward-looking than before”.

The world's most successful trading countries have formal structures to tap into business expertise ahead of and during major trade negotiations. Without a permanent and deep dialogue between business and any government on the practical details of trade across borders, UK negotiators may lack crucial insights that would allow them to deliver the best possible deal.

In March 2018 we co-published our report '[UK Trade Policy – Institutions and Procedures for the 21st Century](#)' with the London School of Economics. Based on extensive engagement with trade experts from practice and academia from around the world, the report looked at exactly how to deliver the structures which lead to trade deals that deliver for UK businesses and consumers. The Report made 6 key conclusions on how best to do that.

We consequently believe the main conclusions (in Section 6 of the Report) should be incorporated into the Bill to give certainty for business and individuals and to lead to better economic outcomes in the short-, medium- and long-terms. We have consistently argued for their inclusion in conversation with key partners, and with the number of trade deals which will be needed they are more important now than ever.

In short, those conclusions are:

1. establish a formal process for engaging with stakeholders, including the creation of a set of minimum standards on a statutory footing with formal guidelines;
2. introduce a formal and flexible committee structure, ensuring targeted engagement with key partners throughout all stages of negotiations;
3. enhance civil society dialogues, encompassing a range of sectors and regions;
4. enable the structured use of online consultations, to provide a basis for constructive UK dialogue in the UK for civil society at large;
5. adapt and implement the 'room-next-door' model in negotiations, allowing key partners to provide feedback and advice in real time as the negotiations progress; and
6. provide transparency through reports and enforcement, to provide key partners with information at all stages of the policy-making process.

I would be very happy to discuss any of the recommendations or related issues in more detail. If you wish to, I would be grateful if you could contact Adam Szpala, Campaigns and Public Affairs Officer, in the first instance on [REDACTED] or a.szpala@britishchambers.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Liam Smyth
Director, Trade Facilitation
British Chambers of Commerce