



Friday, 8 November 2024

Dear Ambassador Rawlings and Ambassador Duchêne,

We are writing to share the key business-led recommendations for enhancing UK-France bilateral relations discussed at the recent UK-France Business Forum (“The Forum”) held in Paris on 16th and 17th October.

The Forum brought together more than 40 UK and French companies to discuss practical ways to deepen bilateral cooperation and address the opportunities and challenges in light of new governments in both countries.

Established by the bilateral chambers in 2022, the UK-France Business Forum serves as a collaborative platform to advance economic ties, facilitate cross-border trade, and address shared challenges. With the anticipated 2025 UK-France Summit and the broader context of a UK-EU reset, we believe this is a critical moment for business priorities to shape the future direction of economic collaboration between our two nations.

While acknowledging healthy competition between our countries, we believe there are significant opportunities for collaboration, particularly in key areas like sustainability, industrial competitiveness, and digital transformation. The UK has experienced renewed growth, and France is a leader in European industrial innovation. With shared ambitions and complementary strengths, both nations can drive forward growth.

This letter sets out the Forum’s key areas for UK-France bilateral collaboration. During the recent Forum, members discussed the UK-EU reset, recognising that our bilateral recommendations sit within the broader context of strengthening UK-EU relations. The recommendations from this discussion have been outlined separately in Appendix 1.

UK-France Bilateral Collaboration

1. Energy Collaboration

Energy cooperation between the UK and France is already robust. The Forum acknowledges the **bilateral energy partnership** and believes there is potential to further strengthen alignment and accelerate the adoption of renewable energy. We recommend the following priorities:

- Identify joint projects in hydrogen, offshore wind, biomethane, and energy grid development.
- Develop a comprehensive bilateral energy plan that targets key technologies, including hydrogen production, storage, and transportation.
- Foster joint R&D initiatives between businesses and research institutions to reduce hydrogen production costs and accelerate commercialisation.

2. Talent Exchange

A significant drop in student and youth exchanges between the UK and France post-Brexit has weakened the cultural and professional ties between our nations. Internships and short-term work placements also face unnecessary barriers due to visa complexities. We recommend a **bilateral agreement** to restore streamlined student and youth exchange programs, building on existing frameworks like VIE (Volontariat International en Entreprise) and Erasmus+. Reinvigorating these exchanges will not only strengthen cultural connections but also equip both countries with skilled talent that supports innovation and economic resilience.

3. Border Management

Given the importance of the UK-France border as a critical gateway for trade and the movement of people, it is essential to implement advanced border technologies that ensure seamless and efficient crossings. We recommend the establishment of a **UK-France Dialogue on Border Technology** to align digital solutions, such as biometric pre-registration apps, and enhance border infrastructure to maintain competitiveness and fluid business operations.

4. Industrial Strategy Coordination

Aligning the industrial strategies of the UK and France, particularly in clean energy, artificial intelligence (AI), and supply chains, offers a unique opportunity to leverage both countries' strengths. We support departmental **dialogue on industrial** strategy which was formalised in the Joint Declaration of March 2023.

5. Defence Sector Supply Chains

The UK and France are key players in European defence, and a more integrated supply chain would benefit both nations. We propose a renewed **Lancaster House Agreement** that identifies bottlenecks in the defence supply chain, interoperability, and facilitates cross-border trade of defence-related products without regulatory hurdles.

Several of these recommendations are outlined in significant detail in the reports of the Forum's **Clean Growth, Tech and Mobility Working Groups**.

Forum members were grateful for the update on the progress towards the **2025 AI Action Summit** hosted by France and were encouraged that the summit while continuing to address the AI safety issues that were at the heart of the Bletchley Park Summit in November 2023, also focuses on the opportunities that AI can bring to society.

The bilateral chambers are committed to promoting the summit to members and encouraging businesses to contribute to working groups on AI governance and organise events as part of the **“Road to the AI Action Summit”**.



As we look toward 2025 and beyond, there is a clear opportunity for both governments to act on the business-led recommendations from the UK-France Business Forum. These proposals offer practical steps to strengthen the bilateral relationship, drive sustainable economic growth, and reaffirm the UK-France partnership as a model for collaborative success.

We hope that these priorities will shape the agenda of the UK-France Summit. Both Chambers stand ready to work with your teams to refine and develop the recommendations outlined in this paper.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "F. Viaia".

Fabienne Viaia
President,
French Chamber of Commerce in GB

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "F. Rausch".

Françoise Rausch
President,
Franco-British Chamber in Paris

APPENDIX 1: DRIVING THE EU RESET

In addition to bilateral cooperation, the Forum identified critical business priorities for a **UK-EU reset**, which will be essential to securing long-term economic growth.

1. Mutual Recognition of Industrial Standards

Post-Brexit divergence in certification processes is creating unnecessary costs for businesses and friction at the border. The Forum supports a **mutual recognition framework** for industrial standards, particularly in defence, energy, pharmaceuticals, food and agriculture, which would streamline operations and reduce regulatory complexity across the UK and EU.

2. Energy Market Cooperation

The UK's departure from the EU has introduced complexities in energy trading and pricing. We recommend enhancing alignment between the UK and EU energy markets, including the UK's potential **re-engagement with the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS)** or the development of an equivalent system that complements the EU's ETS.

3. Talent Exchange and Skills Recognition

Simplifying visa procedures for short-term business and student exchanges is essential, alongside a UK-EU agreement on **mutual recognition of qualifications and professional standards** in sectors like engineering, healthcare, finance and professional services. An **EU-wide youth mobility scheme** should also be prioritized to address critical skill shortages.

4. Joint UK-EU Approach on Border Technology

The lack of coordination on border technology and digital pre-registration systems could lead to significant delays for businesses and travellers. A **joint UK-EU approach** focused on the rapid deployment of digital pre-registration apps and biometric systems is necessary to ensure smooth cross-border flows and maintain operational fluidity.

5. Investment and Scale-Up Support

Both the UK and the EU face challenges in scaling startups, particularly in the technology and energy sectors. Forum members are interested in exploring the potential for joint UK-EU funding mechanisms or innovation hubs that could pool resources and potentially offer startups access to both markets, supporting them during their scale-up phase and fostering innovation in key sectors.