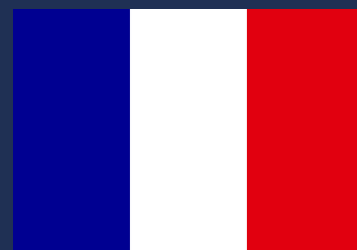


Turning Strategic Alignment into Delivery



Insights from the
Franco-British Business
Conference 2026



**FRENCH CHAMBER
OF GREAT BRITAIN**



THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the highlights and key insights of the Franco-British Business Conference 2026.

We met at a time of considerable uncertainty. Yet one of the strongest messages to emerge from this year's Conference was a message of confidence. Despite successive economic and geopolitical shocks, businesses across the United Kingdom and France continue to adapt, invest and build the foundations for future growth.

The Franco-British relationship has a vital role to play. Sovereignty does not mean isolation. It means having the capacity to act, invest and deliver with trusted partners. The role of the Chamber is to bridge policy ambition and business reality, ensuring that dialogue leads to practical action and stronger partnerships.

I hope the insights captured in this report reflect both the quality of the discussions and the strength of the Franco-British partnership. I want to take this opportunity to thank our delegates and our sponsors, firstly our Prestige Sponsor, Thales, followed by our panel sponsors, OVH Cloud, Pinsent and Masons, and Dassault Systèmes. and finally, our media partner Fortune.

Emmanuelle Bury
President, French Chamber of Great Britain

FRANCO- BRITISH BUSINESS CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE



DELEGATES



20+

SPEAKERS AND MODERATORS



130+

**ORGANISATIONS
REPRESENTED**



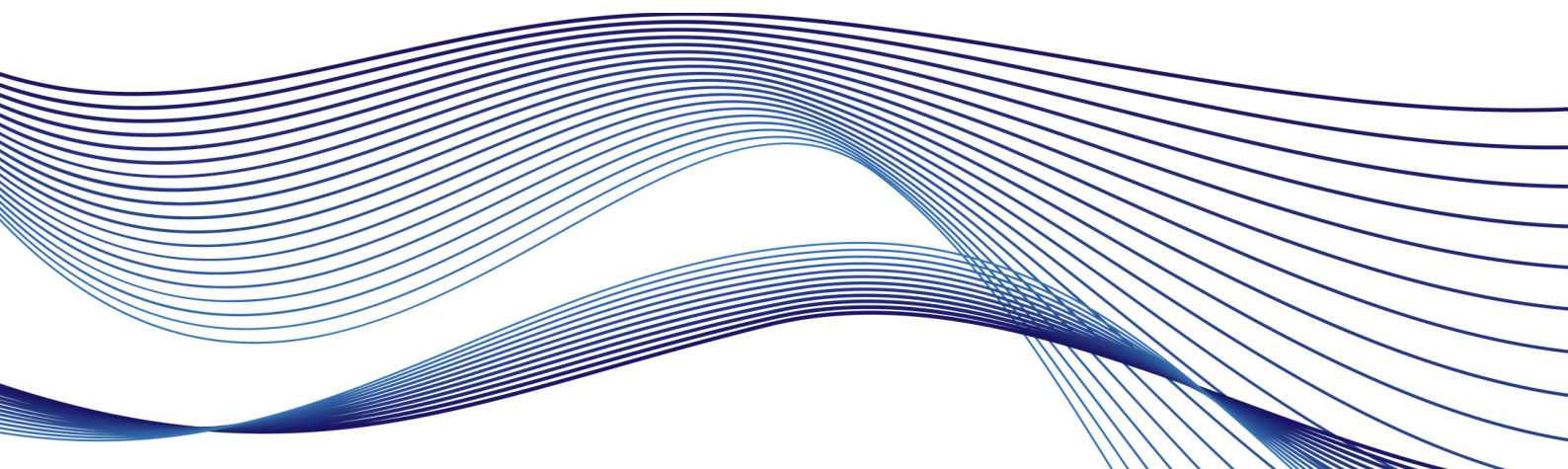
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**GOVERNMENT, DIPLOMATIC
AND INFLUENTIAL
REPRESENTATIVES**

INTRODUCTION

The Franco-British Business Conference 2026 brought together senior business leaders, policymakers, investors and diplomats to examine a central question: how do we translate strategic ambition into practical delivery?

Across defence, energy, technology and industrial strategy, delegates identified a common challenge. The issue is no longer a lack of ambition or investment. The challenge is execution. Throughout the day, discussions focused on how the UK and France can strengthen competitiveness, resilience and growth in a rapidly changing world



FIVE KEY CONCLUSIONS



1. The Challenge is No Longer Strategy. It is Delivery.

Across defence, energy, AI and industrial policy there was broad agreement on priorities. The challenge now lies in execution. In defence, procurement systems and fragmented supply chains continue to slow the translation of spending commitments into capability. In energy, infrastructure and grid constraints have become the dominant bottlenecks. In AI, organisations are struggling to move from experimentation to deployment. The Conference concluded that the next phase of UK-France cooperation must focus on creating the conditions that enable delivery.



2. Infrastructure Has Become a Strategic Issue.

Grid capacity emerged as the dominant constraint on energy competitiveness, while data centres, compute capacity and energy availability were identified as critical enablers of future AI adoption. In defence, industrial capacity and supply chains were repeatedly highlighted as essential to operational readiness. Infrastructure is no longer simply a supporting function; it has become a strategic asset that underpins competitiveness, resilience and security.



3. Economic Security and Competitiveness Are Now Inseparable.

Businesses are now making investment decisions through a security lens as well as a commercial one, while governments are placing greater emphasis on trusted partnerships, strategic sectors and supply-chain resilience. The result is a growing convergence between economic policy and national security objectives.



4. Europe's Challenge Is Scaling Innovation.

The challenge lies in commercialising, deploying and scaling innovation rapidly enough to remain competitive. The Defence panel highlighted the difficulty of integrating emerging technologies into procurement systems designed for a different era, while the AI discussion identified similar barriers to enterprise-wide adoption. Future competitiveness will depend not only on innovation itself, but on the ability to deploy innovation at scale



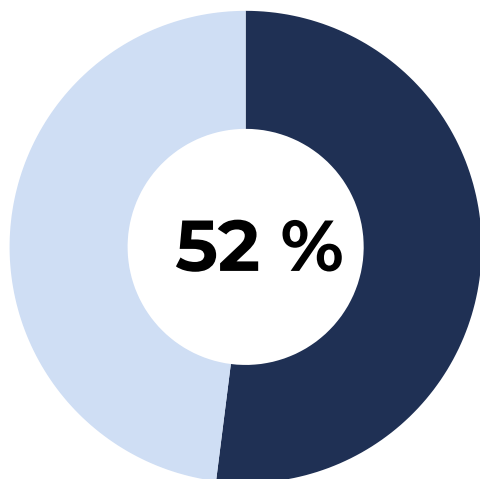
5. The Franco-British Relationship Matters More Than Ever.

The UK brings globally connected financial markets, innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurial flexibility. France contributes industrial depth, infrastructure capability and long-term strategic coordination. Together, both countries possess significant strengths in defence, energy, technology and advanced manufacturing.

WHAT BUSINESS LEADERS TOLD US

Energy & Climate Transition

52% of participants identified grid capacity and infrastructure as the biggest constraint on energy competitiveness, reinforcing the conclusion that delivery has become the principal challenge.



Grid capacity and infrastructure as the biggest constraint

Defence & Economic Security

42% identified procurement complexity as the biggest barrier to defence industrial delivery, while 26% highlighted supply-chain fragmentation.

42 %



Procurement Complexity

26 %



Supply- Chain Fragmentation

AI, Digital & Industrial Innovation

The leading barriers to AI adoption were return on investment, skills shortages and compliance risk. Almost half of respondents identified investment in data, compute and energy infrastructure as the most important accelerator of adoption.



Return on Investment



Skill Shortages



Compliance Risk

A CONFERENCE BUILT AROUND OUTCOMES

Defence & Economic Security

Questions about whether defence spending should increase or whether cooperation matters were largely treated as settled. Instead, the discussion focused on how to convert political alignment into industrial outcomes.

Procurement complexity emerged as the dominant concern, with audience polling showing it as the biggest barrier to delivery. Panellists argued that many procurement systems remain optimised for compliance and process assurance rather than speed and adaptability. The discussion also highlighted the growing importance of SMEs, software companies and emerging technology firms, which are increasingly responsible for innovation but often struggle to access defence programmes.

The lessons of Ukraine featured prominently throughout the session, particularly the need for faster innovation cycles, greater industrial agility and stronger integration between industry and operational requirements.

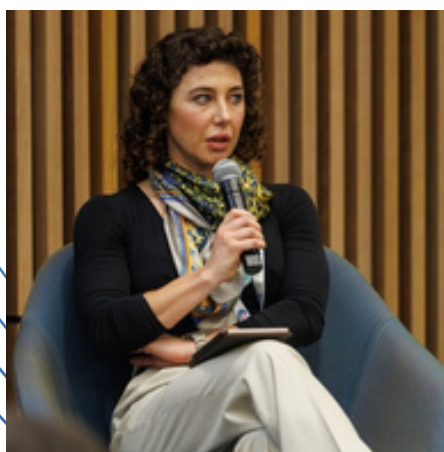


Energy & Climate Transition

The Energy panel marked a noticeable shift in the debate around the transition. Rather than focusing on generation targets or individual technologies, speakers concentrated on the ability of energy systems to deliver reliable, affordable power at scale.

Audience polling reflected this change in emphasis. More than half of participants identified grid capacity and infrastructure as the biggest constraint on competitiveness, significantly ahead of energy prices. Speakers argued that many projects are effectively ready to proceed but remain constrained by network limitations, planning processes and delivery capacity

The discussion also challenged simplistic debates around nuclear versus renewables. Instead, panellists emphasised the importance of system design, combining stable baseload generation, flexible assets, storage, demand-side management and digital technologies. A particularly important insight was that electrification is increasingly being viewed not simply as a climate objective, but as a tool for industrial competitiveness and economic growth.



AI, Digital & Industrial Innovation

Rather than concentrating on frontier models, regulation or speculative future scenarios, panellists explored why organisations continue to struggle to deploy AI at scale despite rapid technological progress.

The strongest conclusion was that AI is not failing technologically. It is stalling organisationally

Speakers argued that most businesses can now access powerful AI tools, but far fewer possess the data quality, governance frameworks, organisational capability and workforce readiness required to integrate them effectively. Several panellists noted that AI is often exposing weaknesses that already existed within organisations, including fragmented systems, inconsistent data and incomplete digital transformation programmes.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of trust, both in AI outputs and in organisational governance. Combined with audience polling on skills, compliance and return on investment, the session suggested that the future of AI competitiveness will depend as much on organisational transformation as technological innovation.



LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

FLAGSHIP CEO INTERVIEW WITH SIMONE ROSSI, EDF Energy

“Productivity is created through standardisation, replication and modular construction.”

Drawing on EDF's experience, the discussion highlighted the scale, complexity and workforce requirements involved in building the infrastructure needed to deliver a clean, secure, homegrown energy system, and the role of clean energy infrastructure in supporting economic growth and industrial competitiveness. A recurring theme was that productivity is created through standardisation, replication and modular construction – as well as driving improvements in safety and quality. The implications extend well beyond energy to defence manufacturing, transport infrastructure and industrial strategy more broadly.



The interview also offered a thought-provoking perspective on the evolution of the energy transition. Rather than framing the challenge primarily through the language of Net Zero, the discussion underscored the need to think carefully about the balance between sustainability, security and affordability, in a context where the latter is front of mind for households and businesses today. Electrification was presented not simply as a decarbonisation pathway, but as a route to energy security, competitiveness and economic growth.



**Standardisation and
replication drives
productivity**



**Electrification is a
route to energy security
and
competitiveness**



**Balance regulation
with delivery**



A further theme concerned the relationship between regulation and delivery, exploring whether regulatory systems are appropriately calibrated to reflect the strategic importance of critical infrastructure. The discussion noted the importance of maintaining high standards, while avoiding unnecessary barriers to investment and delivery – with the need to strike the right balance between progress and protecting the environment being one example offered here.

FIRESIDE CHAT



Industrial Strategy is back



Innovation and capability



Investment with purpose



Economic security as a priority



Future growth and resilience



With Sam Lister, Director General Industrial Strategy, UK Government,



And Pierre Lissot, Deputy Director of Foresight, Economic Studies, and Evaluation, Ministry of Economy and Finance



One of the strongest themes was the return of industrial strategy as a mainstream policy tool. Speakers argued that governments are increasingly required to make deliberate choices about strategic sectors, technological capabilities and investment priorities. In a world characterised by geopolitical uncertainty, technological competition and supply-chain vulnerabilities, industrial strategy is no longer viewed as an ideological preference but as a practical necessity.



The conversation also highlighted the growing convergence between British and French approaches. While the two countries retain different institutional traditions, both are grappling with similar challenges: improving productivity, strengthening industrial capacity, accelerating innovation and reducing strategic dependencies.



Strategic consistency emerged as another key insight. Businesses repeatedly seek clarity, predictability and confidence when making long-term investment decisions. The discussion suggested that maintaining a stable direction of travel may be more important than any individual policy intervention.

Finally, the discussion reinforced a wider conference theme: economic security is increasingly shaping industrial, energy and technology policy. The ability of trusted partners to coordinate investment, innovation and capability development will be critical to future competitiveness and resilience.

LOOKING AHEAD

“ **The Future of the Franco-British partnership depends not only on shared ambition- but on our ability to deliver together** ”

The Franco-British Business Conference has evolved into more than an annual business event. It has become a platform through which business leaders, policymakers and investors can test ideas, challenge assumptions and contribute practical insight to the evolving UK-France agenda.

As both countries seek to strengthen competitiveness, resilience and economic security, the Conference provides a forum focused not simply on what should happen next, but on how to make it happen.

As both countries seek to strengthen competitiveness, resilience and economic security, the Conference provides a forum focused not simply on what should happen next, but on how to make it happen.

In a world defined by uncertainty, the strength of the Franco-British partnership will depend not only on shared ambition, but on the ability to deliver together.

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