

GERMAN INDUSTRY UK

THE VOICE OF GERMAN BUSINESS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM



STATEMENT GERMAN BUSINESS WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM April 2024

OVERVIEW

The UK has long been one of Germany's most important investment locations and markets worldwide.

Some 25,000 German companies do business with the UK today. 15,000 sell direct and 7,500 via agents and distributors. 2,500 set up subsidiaries here, of which 2,000 are sales and services and 500 manufacturing companies, employing some 450,000 people.

The UK is not only important as a market but also of great strategic significance for German international business. Many takeovers of British companies confirm this.

Major German companies in the UK today are: Aldi, Allianz (since their takeover of Cornhill Insurance), BASF (Boots), Bayer, BMW (Mini and Rolls-Royce), Bosch (Atco-Qualcast and Worcester Heating), Daimler, Deutsche Bahn (Arriva, DB Cargo U and Grand Central Railway), Deutsche Bank (Morgan Grenfell), Deutsche Post (DHL), Eon (Midlands Electricity, Npower, Powergen and TXU), Heidelberg Cement (Hanson), Lidl, Linde (BOC), Otto Group (Freemans Grattan Holdings), RWE, Siemens, TUI (Thomson and First Choice), ThyssenKrupp and Volkswagen (Bentley).

Deutsche Post - DHL (50,000 employees), Deutsche Bahn - Arriva (33,000), Aldi (29,000) and Lidl (26,000) are the largest German companies in this country. The majority of the German companies in the UK employ, however, only up to 200 people.

German business is mainly located outside London, in South East England and in the Midlands. German banks, insurance companies and consultants etc are based in London.

MARKET

German products (and services) have always sold well in the British market. 'Made in Germany', especially with reference to cutting edge innovation and modern design is still a sign of high quality. The strength of German business in the UK is therefore in the up market business where quality often matters more to the customer than price. German business sells mainly motor cars, machinery, electrical, as well as chemical and pharmaceutical products. German food too has been doing well for a long time.

However, business with the UK has declined considerably during the last few years, mainly because of Brexit.

COSTS

The UK has been offering good location conditions with lower labour and tax costs for some time.

Labour costs

According to the German Federal Statistics Office labour costs per working hour in manufacturing industry (direct pay and benefits) are today

In the UK - £27.03 (€31.63)

In Germany - £33.32 (€38,99)

Tax costs

Corporation tax: 25% on all profits.

Income tax: 20% on income from £12,571 to £50,270, 40% on income from £50,271 and £150,000, and 45% on income over £150,000.

Britain has no wealth tax and only one local (council) tax.

£1.00 = €1.17

VAT is 20%

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The employer's contribution to social security of the employee (health, pension, unemployment and accident) accounts for a maximum of 13.8% of the gross salary of the employee (and the employee's own contribution for a maximum of 8%). In addition, red tape has been reduced, for example planning procedures have been shortened, trade union power run down and there is also no codetermination by law.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Labour relations can be described as good today. Most members of GIUK confirm this.

BUSINESS & INVESTMENT CLIMATE

The UK is an attractive location for German business. An ever expanding market and low costs are good arguments for a German company to set up in the UK. Also, the British investment climate has been favourable since the 1980's and government has been stable. Between 1997 and 2010 the Labour Governments carried on the business friendly policies of previous Conservative Governments (1979 until 1997), which German business welcomes.

Less state and more market.

From May 2010 until May 2015 the Coalition Government of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats continued with the market economy. On 7 May 2015 an all Conservative Government was elected and on 8 June 2017 a minority Conservative Government was re-elected and on 12 December 2019 another Conservative Government was elected with a big majority in Parliament. The investment climate remains excellent.

Of concern are employment laws like the working time regulations, introduced since former Prime Minister Blair signed the EU Social Charter during his first term in office, which makes the UK less attractive as a location. Old problems like poor infrastructure (road and rail) and (vocational) training we feel are still unresolved which also burdens German business with extra costs. Massive long term investments and something like the German Dual Vocational Training System are needed.

A more recent concern was the Referendum on the EU on 23 June 2016. GIUK said, in July 2015, that whilst we support Prime Minister David Cameron, campaigning for significant reductions in EU costs, bureaucracy and regulations, we believe it is in the UK's best interest to stay in the EU. This was confirmed by our survey amongst the whole of German business published in July 2015. German business was disappointed that the British people voted to leave the EU, however despite the many challenges ahead, we should not leave the UK which has long been one of Germany's most important investment locations and markets worldwide. For the forthcoming UK-EU Negotiations for Brexit we then published a Statement in January 2017, 'Key German Business Priorities'. This was done in cooperation with 14 of our largest companies in membership. The Statement was sent to the British Government and was discussed with Mr Robin Walker MP, Minister in the Department for Exiting the EU, on 21 September 2017 and then with senior officials at the Department on 26 October 2017. We then discussed it with Sir Keir Starmer MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, on 21 March 2018 and at a second meeting with Senior Officials at the Department on 4 July 2018 along with a major 'Survey amongst German business in the UK, After Brexit: much uncertainty' the results of which were published in April 2018. We further discussed Brexit with the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, the Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable MP, on 10 October 2018 and at a third meeting with Senior Officials at the Department, on 31 October 2018. Other Dinner Discussions on Brexit were held on 4 April 2019 with the Rt Hon Graham Brady MP, Chairman of the 1922 Committee and 9 October 2019 with Mr James Duddridge MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Exiting the EU and we had a Roundtable Discussion on Post-Brexit Transition with the Minister for Investment at the Department for International Trade, Mr Graham Stuart MP, on 24 February, 2020. We have undertaken a survey amongst German business in the UK on Post-Brexit Challenges in February and March 2021 and discussed the results with the new Minister for Investment, Lord Grimstone of Boscobel Kt online on 14 April 2021, with two more meetings to follow, online on 12 January and a Dinner Discussion on 19 May 2022. We also discussed 'Relations between the UK and Germany' with the Minister of State at the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the Rt Hon Greg Hands MP on 20 October 2021, this was originally planned for 22 October 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions. We also discussed our concerns online with the Minister for Industry, Mr Lee Rowley MP, on 7 June 2022. In order to discuss our challenges with the new Government under Rishi Sunak, we undertook a survey on the 'Current Challenges Facing German Business in the UK', the results are available on our website, published on November 2022. We discussed these challenges again with Lord Dominic Johnson of Lainstone CBE, Minister of State at the Department for Business and Trade, on 7 March in London and Ms Nusrat Ghani MP, Minister of State at the Department for Business and Trade on 8 February 2024 in London.