

British  
Chambers of  
Commerce  
The Ultimate Business Network

# Policy Activities Report

July - December 2009

“A new director, new policy campaigns and a new look for the Policy Activities Report - here’s how the BCC policy team is making the case for Chambers and their members in the corridors of power. PAR will now run quarterly, and will complement our policy and legislative briefs, all accessible online at [www.britishchambers.org.uk](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk).”

## Highlights:

In July, the BCC released the Q2 Quarterly Economic Survey (QES). It received excellent exposure in the national and regional media, with Director General David Frost appearing on Radio 4’s Today programme, Sky News and BBC Breakfast. The QES has been frequently referenced in the Bank of England’s reports, and has helped to influence the Monetary Policy Committee’s decisions on quantitative easing and interest rates.

Over the summer, the BCC was quick to recognise the need for businesses to prepare for a potential threat from swine flu. We hosted a swine flu advice and guidance “webinar”, which included an interview with Dr Laurence Buckman, Chairman of the General Practitioners’ Committee at the British Medical Association. To date, the webinar has been accessed by over 5,000 Chambers and businesses.

BCC attended all three main political party conferences this autumn, using the season to launch our Pre-Budget Report submission and Business Manifesto, which officially kicked off our campaigns on infrastructure, tax & regulation and international trade. We also put on two high-profile Business Question Time events on the economy at the Conservative and Labour Conferences. At Labour, Minister for Employment and Welfare, Jim Knight, and Minister for Trade, Investment and Small Business, Lord Davies, sat on our panel with David Frost acting as chair. At the Conservatives in Manchester, Adam Marshall chaired a panel with the Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Philip Hammond, and Standard Chartered Bank’s Chief Economist, Gerard Lyons. Aside from putting on these two successful events, we

held meetings with several senior officials, government ministers at Cabinet level, and shadow ministers.

Together with the Chamber Network, we published a high-speed rail report entitled ‘*High Speed High Time: the business case for high speed rail*’. Key in its recommendations was a call for a UK-wide network and a binding political consensus on route options and funding.

Preparations have begun in earnest for the 2010 Annual Conference, which will be held on March 18th in Central London. Chamber Chief Executives are being kept up-to-date on this year’s event. Confirmed speakers already include Shadow Business Secretary, Ken Clarke, Transport Secretary, Lord Adonis, enterprise champion, Lord Sugar and French Economy Minister Christine Lagarde.

Successful lobbying by the BCC led to the Agency Workers Directive being pushed back to the last possible implementation date in October 2011, as well as other regulatory changes.

In December, the BCC is hosting the first Business Infrastructure Commission meeting. Securing the participation of Chambers and senior figures from the energy, transport and ICT industries, the Commission will monitor the work being done by Government to progress infrastructure projects of national significance and will set out business priorities for the nation’s infrastructure over the next thirty years.

The BCC secured a number of policy wins in the Chancellor’s Pre-Budget Report. These included measures to help businesses with cashflow and access to finance



## Trade & Enterprise Campaign

Working with Chambers of Commerce, we are highlighting export opportunities for our manufacturing and service industries, and developing solutions to improve the UK's trade finance, promotion and skills framework.

### June

BCC published a Trade Survey entitled *Exporting Britain*, which carried responses from over 3,000 businesses across the UK.

### October

Adam Marshall gave evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee inquiry into Exporting out of Recession.

### November

BCC hosted an event on the opportunities for business emerging from the EU Services Directive at Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. This was followed with a seminar in the North East, and further events are planned for 2010.

### December

The campaign team is now preparing a report making recommendations for trade finance reform. Trade finance underpins roughly 90% of all global trade, so it is crucial that availability problems do not impact on British businesses' ability to export. The report will be launched early in the New Year.

## Tax & Regulation Campaign

The tax and regulation campaign focuses on freeing business from the burden of red tape so that they can create jobs and growth, and on ensuring that future tax rises do not stifle the business community's ability to drive economic recovery.

### July

Steve Hughes sat on the Administrative Burdens Reduction External Validation Panel, which analyses Government Departments' claimed regulatory savings.

### October

Steve Hughes spoke at the Second Annual Regulatory Reform Conference on Strengthening Regulatory Management.

Abigail Morris gave oral evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Flexible Working.

### November

The BCC met with John Penrose MP, Shadow Regulation Minister, to discuss Conservative policy proposals should they win an election next year.

BCC held a joint business briefing in the House of Lords on the Equality Bill, together with the EEF, FSB and CBI.

Adam Marshall gave a presentation to HR professionals on what the Equality Bill means for business.

### December

An Employment Law Timeline - highlighting the costs of upcoming regulation to business - was published.

## Infrastructure Campaign

We are campaigning for the political parties to commit to investment in our vital business infrastructure. Over the coming months the BCC will be publishing information that will

highlight where limited investment can be utilised most effectively, while highlighting a greater role for private finance.

### October

Gareth Elliott spoke at a Place West London Transport Conference on the economic benefits of Heathrow expansion.

BCC met with Lord Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport and the department's Strategy Unit to discuss their spending expectations, and to present our infrastructure campaign.

Gareth Elliott spoke at a Leeds City Region fringe meeting at the Conservative Party conference on the need for effective transport infrastructure.

### November

Along with Chambers, we published a high-speed rail report, *'High Speed High Time: the business case for high speed rail'*. It called for a UK wide network and a binding political consensus on route options and funding.

The team met Theresa Villiers, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, to discuss Conservative transport policy proposals, and aviation and rail in particular.

BCC attended the Transport Select Committee on priorities on investment in the railways, and the Business and Enterprise Committee inquiry into broadband speed.

### December

The BCC Business Infrastructure Commission - with representatives from Chambers and leading businesses, such as Virgin Rail, BAA, British Gas, Asda and Areva - met for the first time in London.

## Brussels Office

Better Regulation: Concrete proposals for better scrutiny of Impact Assessments in the European Parliament have been drawn up by the BCC to launch our campaign for EU better regulation. These proposals have been circulated to the other 26 EU Chambers of Commerce for consultation and approval.

Services Directive: There remains plenty of work to do before European businesses can exploit all the opportunities that the directive provides. BCC is working with Chambers across the UK to organise seminars on the Services directive, and the feedback from these sessions is being taken to the EU institutions to ensure that any barriers to access are torn down.

The Ultimate Business Network in Brussels: In October more than 70 representatives from across the Network came to Brussels for a day of lobbying. We met the Commission to talk about the follow-up to the Small Business Act, cross examined each UK political party's offering for business with MEPs, and networked with hundreds of other Chambers and business from the EU.

Two further Chamber visits are planned for March and October. These will focus on specific lobbying priorities and the October visit will be combined with the well-regarded European Parliament of Enterprises.



## Other Business Policy Team Outputs

In June, the BCC published a Planning report, *Planning for Recovery*, which explored the issues businesses faced trying to get important projects approved and built.

In July, we hosted a National Business Policy Council meeting of Chambers to discuss economic issues and the BCC Manifesto. This included presentations from Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman, Vince Cable, and our Chief Economist, David Kern.

BCC published a Tourism report in association with the hotel chain, Travelodge. The report, *Backing UK Tourism: Destination Recovery*, was released in July and was widely picked up by ministers, peers, and civil servants in the business department.

In September, BCC was the first business group to publish a Business Manifesto entitled *Delivering for Britain: A Business Blueprint for Opportunity, Jobs and Growth*.

Two Strategic Policy Group Meetings were held with Chambers over the last few months - one via teleconference and the other at St Helens Chamber of Commerce. The new Advisory Council - part of the BCC's new corporate governance structure - also met for the first time in November to scrutinise policy strategy and report on regional conditions and concerns.

## Consultation Responses & Select Committee Evidence

### July

- Agency Workers Directive
- Equal treatment in Goods and Services Directive (UK consultation)
- APPG intergenerational fairness evidence

### September

- Low Pay Commission evidence on an Apprentice National Minimum Wage
- Low Pay Commission evidence
- Public Sector Duty consultation (Equality Bill)
- Transitional arrangements for the 2010 Business Rate Revaluation
- BIS Committee inquiry into UK Broadband Speed

### October

- Pensions Act 2008 regulations (Batch 2)
- Equality & Human Rights Commission gender pay gap reporting consultation
- Evidence to All Party Parliamentary Group on small business
- BIS Select Committee on exporting

### November

- Additional Paternity Leave and Pay consultation

### December

- Agency Workers Directive (second consultation)

## Economy Outputs

We are constantly following a range of economic data from the Office of National Statistics and the Bank of England. Chief Economist David Kern is quick to highlight what the data means for British businesses, and his reactions and comments have helped influence the Monetary Policy Committee's decisions - particularly around the need to boost money supply to viable, credit-worthy companies.

BCC presented its Pre-Budget Report submission to the Chancellor at the Labour Party Conference in September, and to the Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury at the Conservative Conference. We also met senior No. 10, Treasury and BIS officials to discuss our submission throughout the autumn.

December's Pre-Budget Report featured a number of the BCC's recommendations. Most notably an extension to both the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme and HMRC's "Time to Pay" plan. We also secured a policy win for Chamber members on Empty Property Rate Relief, which means the exemption for small businesses with rateable values has been extended to April 2011.

Q2 and Q3 Economic Surveys were published in July and October respectively. The BCC attended a high level Bank of England meeting to discuss both sets of results, and the Bank continues to use these statistics to influence its quarterly Inflation reports, decisions on interest rates and quantitative easing.

Monthly Business Surveys continue to grow in stature amongst policymakers - given their ability to quickly and accurately chart issues viable companies are facing with access to finance. The Bank of England referred to this in its November lending report, and we met Treasury special advisers to discuss the finance situation facing SMEs in greater depth. David Frost was contacted by a wide range of senior banking executives regarding the results from the November survey. The BCC team will continue to fight for an expansion of access to finance for members in 2010.

Chief Economist David Kern has worked hard to crunch the economic data over the last year - and the last quarter in particular. We launched the latest BCC Economic Forecast a few days ahead of the Chancellor's Pre-Budget Report in December, receiving significant media and Government attention.



## What's Coming Up in Q1 2010

2010 marks the BCC's 150th Anniversary. We will be launching a number of initiatives over the year to celebrate.

In mid-January, the Q4 2009 results from over 5,000 businesses that took part in the QES will be released.

In February, the 2010 Burdens Barometer will be released, measuring the regulatory burdens on business nationally and regionally.

On March 18th, the BCC will hold its invitation-only Annual Conference at BAFTA in Central London. A number of high profile speakers and panellists have accepted to date, including, Shadow Business minister, Ken Clarke MP, and Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Adonis.

The results of the 2010 Infrastructure Survey will be published outlining the business priorities within energy, transport and ICT.


BCC will host the second meeting of the Business Infrastructure Commission.

The EU Better Regulation Campaign will continue from the BCC Brussels office.

We will hold more regional EU Services Directive 'export seminars' around the UK, as well as events designed to highlight EU funding opportunities.

Proposals on the future of trade support and promotion - including recommendations on UKTI - will be published.

A map setting out Chambers' regional transport infrastructure priorities for the next Parliament will be published.



## CONTACTING US

If you have any questions about any of the points raised in this Policy Activities Report, our Business Policy Team and Communications Team can be contacted in the following ways:

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