

National Trade Conversation

Northern Ireland

Introduction

The UK is developing trade policy and negotiating trade deals as an individual country for the first time in over 40 years. The success of these new deals will ultimately depend on the extent to which they deliver on what matters most to people in their everyday lives. Rigorous consumer research and insight sit at the heart of how Which? champions consumers' interests, and so the National Trade Conversation was commissioned to get an in-depth understanding of consumers' priorities for trade deals. It gave people a unique opportunity to say what their priorities are when the breadth of issues that could be part of trade talks are explained. Our key research question for the National Trade Conversation was:

What matters to people about the consumer aspects of the UK's trade deals, when the risks and benefits are explained?

The National Trade Conversation uniquely engaged people from around the country and from all walks of life. By involving key experts, UK government departments and interest groups, people were able to go beyond what initially appeared as a highly specialised area, and explore in-depth how the UK trades, how trade deals work and what issues could be on the table.

The research used a deliberative approach. We conducted dialogues in five locations across the UK, engaging with 97 people recruited to reflect a cross section of each locale. The process - involving over 12 hours of information sessions, facilitated discussions and reflective tasks, across two weeks - gave participants an opportunity to explore trade deals in great depth.

This report covers the findings from our research conducted in Northern Ireland. 19 participants took part in our five workshops, held between the 18th August and 29th August 2020. Whilst there was a remarkable amount of common ground across five dialogues in five different locations in the UK, each location had their own distinctive response to our key research question. As will be explored later in the report, Northern Ireland is in a unique situation compared to the rest of the UK, in which their standards

remain aligned with the EU. This is in order to maintain a frictionless border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. As a result a number of the resources/videos shown to participants in Northern Ireland were adapted to reflect this context.

Priorities

UK wide priorities and principles

Throughout the research, we asked participants to think about *the consumer aspects of trade deals that matter most to them*. Looking across all of our five locations, we identified four key priorities that consumers had for future trade deals. Our question asked about the consumer aspects of trade deals, but it is clear from their priorities and the principles that underpin them that for our participants, being a consumer is interwoven with wider views as citizens of the UK. These priorities were shared by most participants in most locations.

The UK wide priorities were:

1) Maintain health and safety standards for food and products

The issue which mattered most and dominated discussions of consumer goods was the importance of maintaining existing standards.

“They must deliver at least the same standards if not more. We're going into this trade deal negotiation with the thought we're going to get worse.”

Northern Ireland

2) Maintain data security regulations that protect consumers rights

There were widely held concerns about what the implications might be for consumers if data protection and online consumer rights were removed.

“Digital trade was always going to be complex in terms of agreements, whilst we use the internet a lot for both work and personal life. I'm pleased that trade deals will protect me when purchasing even more so as this deal moves forward.”

Northern Ireland

3) Help address regional inequalities by protecting and promoting jobs, skills and industries across the UK

Participants wanted to see trade deals help all parts of the UK to thrive – not just London and the South East of England. They wanted the UK government to help those who would need to re-skill if their industry loses out.

“Protect home grown produce and not put them [farmers] at a disadvantage as it is about choice of food and livelihoods and protecting countryside and the environment”

Northern Ireland

4) Protect the environment

Participants wanted to see that the UK’s trade deals align with our environmental and sustainability targets. Participants welcomed the specific focus by some countries on incorporating environmental protection into negotiating priorities.

“Imported food produced to different standards may be cheaper which would be beneficial for those on tight budgets. However, it may be cheaper due to how it has been produced which may have health implications for local populations and cause the ‘off-shoring’ of environmental issues e.g. deforestations”

Northern Ireland

“Economic growth however is unsustainable in environmental terms - now we have an opportunity to develop sustainably. Covid has taught us that our supply chain is fragile, and lacks resilience. Now we have an opportunity to become more self-sufficient and in doing so to protect the environment as well as shorten and strengthen supply chains.” Northern Ireland

“Do we really want to import large US SUV/Trucks? They are environmentally damaging and won’t help us reach our carbon neutral targets)”

Northern Ireland

“My thoughts lay with the USA. So, obviously, they have different safety standards and everything but the Americans are renowned for their large engines, very not eco-friendly, diesel trucks. So, I’m wondering, then, if we had a

trade deal with them, would that impact on the government's strategy to get the CO2 to net zero by 2050".

Northern Ireland

"I suppose by importing stuff from across the world, we're damaging the environment. Increase the tariffs, reduce the carbon footprint and promote NI product."

Northern Ireland

There were also 4 overarching principles which underpinned participant priorities:

Fairness: A trade deal should be beneficial for all involved: to governments, industries and citizens on both sides. The UK has a duty of fairness particularly when making trade deals with smaller, developing economies.

"In particular the UK could gain in terms of productivity and growth and at the same time we could help poorer countries by exploiting comparative advantages."

Northern Ireland

Longevity/Future proofed: In a world that is changing so quickly, participants thought that the UK should be thinking of the long term, scanning the horizon for new opportunities and agree deals that can adapt to the types of changes discussed.

Representing the whole of the UK: Trade deals are perceived as English-centric and lack representation from devolved nations. People wanted reassurance that each region's voice is heard, fully considered and represented in trade deal negotiations. This was a prominent theme in our discussions in Northern Ireland.

"I would want to ask [UK trade negotiators] how they would ensure that Northern Ireland is protected given its unique position within the United Kingdom?"

Northern Ireland

Transparency: Trade deals need to be made more transparent for consumers. Participants felt that consumers are largely excluded from trade deal negotiations and are left with little understanding about the process and outcomes.

“Be transparent and honest about Northern Ireland’s position within trade negotiations”

Northern Ireland

Northern Irish priorities

Figure 1 illustrates a summary of the main themes that came out of the discussions. When we decided to move the National Trade Conversation online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we also decided to commission some visual minutes of the events, shown below.

Figure 1



Each of the three small discussion groups in Northern Ireland developed their priorities during the final workshops. Before deciding on their top 5 priorities, participants were asked to think about the content of all the previous workshops and online tasks and to identify what was most important to them. The table below shows the priorities in Northern Ireland split by discussion group.

| Group 1 priorities | Group 2 priorities | Group 3 priorities |
|--|---|--|
| Making NI a higher priority: There were concerns that NI would not be considered in trade | A balance between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protecting the UK economy and industries | Clear communication (laymen’s terms) of the rules and impact of deals: Don’t know who is |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| deals and this would result in problems with the Northern Irish/Republic of Ireland border. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating more jobs (possibly in digital services) | representing NI in trade deals, left in the dark, news focus on COVID – nothing on trade deals. |
| Addressing wealth inequality: Important for standard of living, ensure you can make meaningful choices, maintain and increase cohesions between groups | Consumer safety: Consumers won't accept compromise on their safety and health. To be led by the evidence | NI is a standing item on all trade agenda items: Ensure NI is thought about at every at every stage, only part of UK with land border with the EU |
| Maintenance of current standards: Reputation for good standards (selling point!), can take for granted the things you buy are safe and what they say they are. | Maintain frictionless border between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland: It's essential to maintain the peace and manageable working arrangements for businesses trading across the border | NI has the option to opt out of trade deals that are not beneficial to NI |
| Global focus on inclusion and diversity (of people and partners): Reliance on one market (USA) risks making the UK weak, with US only thinking of themselves. Can we gain greater independence of political thought and economic power. | Making sure NI economy is not undermined: NI has to maintain equivalence with EU standards which could mean not benefitting from UK trade deals, so will need funding to support this (perhaps through changing how money is distributed from UK government e.g. Barnett formula) | Protection against environmental impacts: Encourage local produce, a clean, green country: higher percentage of energy is renewable, environment and health intrinsically linked. |
| Labor flow and new | Protection of data privacy | Maintain EU standards |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>people with diversity of thought: Necessary for aspects of delivery of trade deals</p> | <p>and accountability of online selling platforms: Digital services one of main exports of UK and growing. There could be harm from products sold online</p> | <p>and regulations: non-negotiable foundation for trade deals.</p> |
|--|---|---|

As seen in the table above, there were two quite different viewpoints amongst participants. Some approached priorities as a consumer, whilst others were clearly driven by their perspective as a citizen. This was further demonstrated by the importance participants placed on the status of Northern Ireland and its future relationship with both mainland Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and the EU. It is important to remember everyone is both a consumer and a citizen and therefore we cannot treat consumers without acknowledging the breadth of issues that affect people in their wider lives.

Looking specifically at the priorities for Northern Irish participants, many were consistent with the wider UK shared priorities. For example, despite Northern Ireland being in a unique position of maintaining equivalence with EU standards, it was still important for participants for the UK as a whole to maintain existing standards of food and consumer goods.

However there were a number of priorities which were unique to our discussions in Northern Ireland. It was important to all three discussion groups that Northern Ireland should be acknowledged in all UK trade deals and not left behind by the terms of these agreements.

“Northern Ireland Protocol should take precedence over everything because of other long-standing agreements and internationally binding laws that have been put in place for the special circumstances of Northern Ireland...”

Northern Ireland

“Sorry, we're going to get a trade deal, but we'll come back to you once we get our trade deal sorted.”

You mean England will get their trade deals, Scotland may get separate trade deals as well going forward, but as a Northern Irish person, all I can see from what we've talked about so far is it's very London-centric, very England-orientated. It's not considering the other nations in any fashion that I can see, and particularly Northern Ireland.”

Northern Ireland

“I think Northern Ireland is the drunk uncle that you avoid at a wedding trying to strike up a conversation with, and I think that a lot of people in England especially, maybe because it's a case of out of sight, out of mind, they know obviously we're part of it, whatever, but it becomes an abstract concept, but for us when this is actually fully up and running and implemented it's going to impact us in a very real way”

Northern Ireland

“We've been talking about UK trade deals and how the UK is going to do these trade deals, but Northern Ireland's in a unique position regarding the EU regulations and standards we have to carry forward, so the whole thing, as far as I can see, this is all English-led regarding trade. Northern Ireland has separate laws that we're going to be trading under going forward, regardless of what trade deals the rest of the mainland get, so I don't know where Northern Ireland fits into any of the trade deals going forward.”

Northern Ireland

Linked to this was the desire to maintain a frictionless border between Northern Ireland and the republic in order to prioritise stability and peace. There were also specific fears that added border checks/paperwork/certificates will result in increased costs for Northern Irish businesses, and as consequence reduce choice and availability for consumers.

“[I'm worried about the] Paperwork [needed for] exporting beef across the border causing delay and bottlenecks”

Northern Ireland

“Most people in NI know that there's likely to be some kind of border checks so important to have a transparent negotiation about this rather than promises politicians can't keep.”

Northern Ireland

Transparency and representation of the whole of the UK were the two principles which strongly drove the priorities within Northern Ireland. Trade deals representing the whole of the UK was a plea made strongly in Northern Ireland. Out of all the discussions

we had as part of the National Trade Conversation, they felt the most distant from the negotiations – characterising Northern Ireland as an annoying inconvenience, poorly understood by the UK government. The perceived English-centric nature of trade deals and lack of representation from devolved nations in negotiations was a cause of frustration for participants in Scotland, Wales as well as Northern Ireland.

“This is where I believe London centric policies on getting trade deals for financial services will cripple our other industries as this is what seems to be our main mission in negotiations of trade deals leaving the other sectors vulnerable to cheaper imports”

Northern Ireland

Some thought their nation would be better served if there was far more visible proof of regional interests and devolved nations’ specific consumer needs being heard, considered and reflected on by the UK Government. This view was held particularly strongly in Northern Ireland, largely due to the complex situation with the UK’s only shared land border with the EU. Participants felt there should be a ‘special trade zone’ to ensure Northern Irish consumer needs were met.

“Our trade deal is going to be different than the mainland UK trade deal, no matter what way it is done going forward. We are under separate regulations and standards, so whatever trade deal the mainland UK, London-centric Government does, they can do it whatever way they want, but it’s not going to be able to be transferred to Northern Ireland.”

Northern Ireland

For some Northern Irish participants, even if they were to receive stronger representation in trade negotiations, there was a feeling of wider dissatisfaction. They expressed negative perceptions of the politicians who represent them, further bolstering their worries that the Northern Irish voice was going unheard and unvalued.

“Why aren’t our politicians more concerned with appearing? I can’t understand why Northern Ireland isn’t maybe more vocal, the politicians, on why Northern Ireland in the UK government’s eyes is down the pecking order, because it’s already got everything that it has, but we’re not going to see any benefits, we’re going to be stuck in no man’s land.”

Northern Ireland

Consumer themes

Food

We kicked off our food discussions with a video featuring a range of organisations with an interest in trade. This was done through the use of expert voices across the food industry to encourage informed discussions. To help explain Northern Ireland's position as a result of the Northern Ireland Protocol we showed videos from Which?, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Fair Trade Foundation, the Ulster Farmers Union, Chatham House and the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium. After watching the videos, participants talked about their views on the implications of trade deals on food. They discussed issues relating to impact on choice, resilience, availability, the potential for lower prices through tariff reductions and were also given examples of food standards and how different standards within the rest of the UK could impact Northern Ireland; despite their standards remaining the same (See the Appendices of the main report for further details). They were asked for their thoughts on the relative opportunities across the different deals, how issues such as standards, price and choice should be balanced, which standards should be maintained, or new ones adopted.

Although Northern Ireland is in a unique situation compared to the rest of the UK in terms of maintaining equivalence with EU standards, it is clear from each of the groups' priorities that maintaining food standards for the UK as a whole is still an important outcome of future trade deals for participants. Similar reasons were given across all of our five locations as to why this was important. Participants were concerned that lower prices of imported food could cause harm both in the UK and in other trading nations - if not considered in the detail of trade deals - by:

- Impacting on health or safety of consumers
- undercutting UK farmers and food producers
- causing environmental harms
- encouraging poor labour standards

- undermining fair trade.

Protecting local industry and standards was a consistent theme within Northern Ireland – along with our discussions in South Wales and East Coast Scotland. Participants stressed the importance of protecting farming from being undercut by the lower standards of production in other countries. Farming – particularly cattle farming - plays a bigger role in Northern Ireland than for other parts of the UK and was thought to be an important part of the Northern Irish economy. There was a fear amongst participants that Northern Irish farmers will be undercut by cheap meat from countries such as Australia and New Zealand who are keen to increase the volume of meat exports to the UK. There were worries that this will impact farmers, local communities and the local landscape.

“I live in a very rural environment; I'm from a farming background. So, I suppose, for me, it would be protecting our home-grown produce, where possible and not putting that at a disadvantage so that we can continue to enjoy produce of Northern Ireland and also, that the landscape and the countryside is protected.”

Northern Ireland

“I don't think we've lost the ability to produce things ourselves, I think we've forgotten about how to produce things ourselves, especially food produce. We used to be a great dairy country, for our animals, for our milk and I think we've lost slightly that ability with the EU and we should be producing things again.”

Northern Ireland

A theme specific to our Northern Irish discussions was the need to ensure consumers there are not at a disadvantage. There was relief among most participants in Northern Ireland that they would be shielded from potential changes to food standards for the time being through the NI Protocol. However, one potential benefit which is frequently stated about trade deals is the opportunity for more choice for consumers, which Northern Irish participants were worried they would miss out on. There were concerns that as a result of the NI Protocol, choice for NI consumers could be reduced due to some

suppliers being reticent to navigate the complexities (e.g. certification, border controls) of getting produce into Northern Ireland.

“I think we need to avoid being at a disadvantage due to this NI protocol, as well. We don’t want to be subjected to fewer products just because we have higher food standards here. We need to ensure that there’s a choice and a variety.”

Northern Ireland

Other consumer goods

Participants were introduced to cars and trade during workshop 3 (see appendices of main report) where they were shown a video which detailed how future trade deals could impact cars, which are the UKs biggest imported and exported good. Participants were also given a car summary sheet (see appendices of main report) in their work packs providing further information on why trade deals matter when it comes to cars. After watching the video in their small groups, participants discussed what they thought were the most important trade implications for cars and why they are important. As a homework task following the workshop, participants watched a short video on trade and toiletries (see appendices), noting down the issues that they felt were most significant. The toiletries video showed Which?, the Cosmetic, Toiletry & Perfumery Association (CTPA), The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) and the British Retail Consortium.

The greatest priority for people around products and trade was safety. This was true for all five locations. Northern Irish participants felt strongly that existing standards for consumer goods should be maintained, and did not want to sacrifice this for more choice. This was the case despite the fact that products available for Northern Irish consumers would be maintaining equivalence with the EU regime. They felt strongly that product safety – especially when it comes to vehicles and toiletries– should never be reduced through a trade deal. After learning about how standards can differ across countries, they thought that any trade deals made should only improve standards and negotiators certainly shouldn’t risk a reduction in current UK standards. Although

participants wanted reasonable prices, they weren't prepared to sacrifice quality in order to achieve this, and felt there was little need for more choice of consumer goods in the UK.

"They should only have a choice between varieties of products containing empirically tested and safe chemicals."

Northern Ireland

"Safety seems to be an issue – pedestrian and passenger safety has knock on effects on NHS, wider economy etc"

Northern Ireland

Another theme which was explored by participants was the potential environmental impact of trade deals. There was some concern that the potential for receiving cheaper goods would result in a trade-off with quality and would encourage a 'throw-away', wasteful attitude amongst consumers with detrimental environmental consequences.

"You buy cheap you buy twice. That's a false economy. This whole thing about making the economy better by reducing the cost of products coming into the UK, you're going down a slippery slide. Are we looking to live in a country that will accept anything, and do anything, as long as we get a financial package? You have to look at what you can accept. The cost of things may go down but is that beneficial in the long run?"

Northern Ireland

One potential benefit of a future UK-USA trade deal is a greater choice of products such as cars and toiletries. Some participants aligned an increase in choice with cheaper prices and were wary about the hidden long term costs of cheaper and possibly poorer standard products.

"So, whilst the cost of the car is obviously important, if we all choose to opt for cheaper cars and cause more road accidents, it actually as a knock-on effect on our whole economy and taxes. The safety impacts on cost as well, in the long run"

Northern Ireland

“Bringing in cheap goods [sometime with low quality] undermines quality and UK manufacturing. [This] serves consumerism and ‘throwaway culture’”

Northern Ireland

“If we all choose to opt for cheaper cars and cause more road accidents, it actually has a knock-on effect on our whole economy and taxes. The safety impacts on cost as well, in the long run.”

Northern Ireland

Digital trade

For the reflection task following workshop 3, we asked participants to watch a video about the growing importance within modern trade agreements of digital trade, and asked for their thoughts on what stood out for them. The same video was shown in all five locations featuring Which?, various experts from The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and experts from the Open Rights Group. Participants were also given a hard copy summary sheet (see Appendices of main report) in their work packs that outlined: UK government ambitions for digital trade, the volume of digital communications being made daily in the UK, UK data privacy through the use of GDPR and the differences in consumer protection between countries. The sheet posed the question about key trade-offs in this area: *Do we reduce our regulations in order to trade digitally with countries with lower standards, possibly resulting in a risk of lower safe guards?*

During workshop 4, we revisited a shorter version of the digital trade video as a refresh before discussing more fully how participants felt the issues raised would impact on trade deals and them. Our discussions around digital trade were similar across all of our five locations, with our Northern Irish participants having comparable responses to participants in other parts of the UK.

Much of the conversation around digital trade focused on two specific consumer areas that really struck a chord with participants:

- (i) the protections of consumer data transferred across borders
- (ii) consumers’ rights relating to online (and therefore cross border) shopping and online services.

Participants acknowledged that digital trade is growing and therefore has an important role in future trade deals. However, there were shared concerns about the complexity of digital trade and therefore stressed the importance of protecting consumers. At some points in the deliberation it felt like more people were willing, as a last resort, to trade away data protections and online rights than, say, food standards. This seeming willingness is partly because the harm and risks to the consumer of weakening data standards are often hidden. However, it is clear that even though some participants said they wanted to find some sort of compromise with countries with more liberal data laws, most actually felt that watering down an already imperfect GDPR regime would be disastrous for consumers. Indeed, some were terrified about diluting standards as they felt vulnerable to the fast changing digital world and needed to know there were minimum protections in place that would protect them now and in the future from things like hacking and scams.

“As digital trade is the future it seems a minefield which I can’t fully understand, I just hope that the current EU laws are updated and enhanced and not reduced so as our information is handled correctly and not sold to just anyone. Source codes could affect the lower paid”

Northern Ireland

“Unlike food or toiletries, where you can educate yourself and vote with your purchasing power to make a choice, it appears to me that whatever deal is done with regards to data, we are just at the mercy of it and we have no control over our data, depending on what agreement is in place because we just won’t have the knowledge.”

Northern Ireland

The USA was a particularly focus for participants in Northern Ireland. There were concerns regarding the differences in safeguarding and consumer protections in the USA, and worries that deals would result in lower protections for consumers here.

“Two issues stuck out to me after watching this video. The first being that the safeguards employed by the USA are so much more lax than those employed by

the UK. I was also struck by the fact that the European Union could stop data flows across channels as a result of any potential agreements that we make with the USA and other countries.”

Northern Ireland

“I was surprised the USA had such low data protection. If things go wrong while dealing with some other countries there doesn't seem to be much come back or accountability.”

Northern Ireland

Despite a number of concerns and worries around the potential risks of digital trade, there was some recognition of the potential benefits. In Northern Ireland, there was an appreciation that digitising trade paperwork could be immensely helpful in softening the border between the North and the South of the island, making commerce quicker and seamless. This was particularly in light of concerns that maintaining equivalence with EU standards could result in lack of choice due to barriers in place for businesses exporting to Northern Ireland.

“Digital technology might help a softer border between NI and ROI for transfer of goods and service – but also suggestions that digital systems could be difficult to implement”

Northern Ireland

Recommendations

The public dialogue commissioned by Which?, co-designed with Hopkins Van Mil, revealed important conclusions for consideration by those negotiating UK trade deals. They include the need to respect fundamental issues such as consumer trust and not to undermine this with an over-simplification of the consumer view. . Conclusions from the deliberative process are summarised in this section.

- The National Trade Conversation demonstrates that **the UK consumer is a complex individual with a range of perspectives. It is inadequate to assume a simplistic view of the consumer, who is entirely focused on choice and price.** Consumers are affected by every aspect of the trade deals under

negotiation. Their priorities take into account choice and price, but in the context of how these choices affect the environment, health, employment and fair trade.

- **Consumers need to trust that any products or services they buy have health and safety standards in place**, so that they don't have to take time and energy in scrutinising everything they buy.
- **The current regulatory framework is seen as part of the UK's reputation for quality products and services** and in line with our national characteristics of striving for high standards. Participants asked for the trade negotiations to build on this strong regulatory platform and for it to evolve over time as the UK makes new, tailor made, trade relationships.
- One of the underlying principles guiding discussions was for the **UK government to apply a long term view to its trade negotiations and avoid quickly negotiated trade deals which have short-term gains, but longer-term harms for the health of the nation and the planet.**
- **The environment was seen time and time again by participants as a fundamental plank of any trade deal.** Participants saw the strong link between trade and the environment and wanted UK trade deals to help deliver the UK's net zero 2050 climate change targets.
- With the UK now negotiating its own trade deals, **consumers expect government to involve them through clear communication about what could change and the evidence and expertise guiding our negotiating goals.**
- **Northern Irish consumers need reassurance that the UK government takes their interests and concerns into account through meaningful involvement.**

The NTC also provides important guidance in terms of the policy approach that the UK government should take, including the opportunities it should be promoting and red lines it should be drawing. Below are the recommendations Which? has for the terms of future trade deals.

Recommendations

- The UK government must ensure that there is no wriggle room in the trade deals that it is negotiating that would weaken the food standards consumers can expect. The UK government should instead take the opportunity to work with trading partners to improve consumer protections and standards – whether for safety, animal welfare or wider sustainability and based on the precautionary

principle. It is positive that the Trade and Agriculture Commission will have a role in scrutinising deals – but it needs to have consumer interest representation to do this effectively.

- This approach is also needed for standards for consumer products more generally. Very different systems can exist in other countries for regulation of consumer products – as well as different systems for setting standards and ensuring compliance with them.
- The UK must ensure that trade deals uphold consumer protections and that any move to alignment or recognition of the other countries' standards, or how compliance with our standards is assessed, will not undermine this.
- The government must ensure that provisions relating to digital trade and data flows within the trade deals it is negotiating uphold the protections that consumers can expect under the current GDPR regime.
- More generally, the UK should look to promote consumer rights in digital trade and enhance regulatory cooperation on cross-border trade with its trading partners. It should also ensure that its ability to enhance legislation on online harms, in line with the wider government agenda to place greater responsibilities on online platforms for the safety and accuracy of their content, is not undermined by new trade deals.
- The UK should play a leading role in placing environmental considerations at the heart of the trade deals it is negotiating, including through a specific chapter that goes beyond the sustainable development chapter that has been included in EU trade deals the UK has been party to. Trade policy needs to be closely aligned with the UK's international, as well as domestic, commitments to tackle climate change as well as with sustainable production and consumption more generally.
- Nothing included within trade deals, including on technical barriers to trade, should dilute the UK's existing standards or inhibit its ability to legislate or

otherwise set standards to help reduce the environmental impact of goods or services or inform consumers about it.

- The UK government needs to ensure a transparent approach to trade negotiations that goes beyond the high level objectives that it has published to date and delivers tangible benefits for people, wherever they live in the country – and as consumers as well as citizens.
- Advisory bodies set up to inform the UK government’s approach need to be drawn from across the UK, but also from different interest groups, including consumer representatives. To date, this has only been achieved to a limited extent. The Strategic Trade Advisory Group (STAG) has representation from a broad range of interests. But the sector specific Trade Advisory Groups (TAGs) which advise the UK government on an on-going basis as the trade deal negotiation rounds take place currently only include business representatives.
- The UK government should build on the NTC ensuring that it engages more people in discussions about its priorities for trade policy and trade deals. This includes its immediate priorities as well as its wider ambitions, such as the CPTPP and longer-term, India, the Gulf and Latin America.
- The UK government should show its commitment to promoting consumer interests in trade deals by negotiating for a specific consumer chapter within trade deals. This would set out key guiding principles for promotion of consumer rights and protections, reinforcing provisions within specific chapters that have implications for consumers, including health protection, technical regulation, competition policy and sustainable development.

Appendix

External links

All outputs of the National Trade Conversation can be found [here](#). This includes the full research report, the appendices to the full report and the policy paper.

Our microsite on trade can be found [here](#), which sets out all of Which?'s work on trade and our response to new trade agreements.

Thank you!

Finally, we would like to thank all 19 participants in Northern Ireland for their enthusiastic contributions to the National Trade Conversation.

