

## **Made in the UK, Sold to the World**

**By Erin Henwood**

The past two years have seen businesses hampered by Covid-19 and its associated restrictions and battle through post-Brexit headwinds. It is perhaps unsurprising that surveying from the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce (GBCC) has painted a somewhat bleak picture of business confidence in international trade over the past few months.

Results from BCC's recently published International Trade Survey revealed that over a third of businesses currently believe that nothing could be done to encourage them to trade internationally in the present economic climate. Potentially more worrying is that over a third of businesses had no plans to be active in the EU market and 41% do not intend to be active in the global non-EU market over the next 12 months.

Similarly, early analysis of the GBCC's Q4 [Quarterly Business Report](#) indicates a slight rise in the number of businesses who anticipate that their export trade will decrease in the coming months, with many citing various concerns about supply chain issues and complicated customs requirements.

Similar sentiment was also expressed by local businesses at a roundtable chaired by the Chamber that took place in November. Businesses emphasised their concerns about international trade and shared details about the barriers they have overcome – or are hoping to – in order to enter international export markets.

One such business commented that, whilst their business had already successfully entered international markets, supply chain issues experienced with EU-based suppliers meant that their operations were being hindered across the globe.

Another shared that they had been attempting to export their products internationally prior to the start of the pandemic, though pandemic-related issues and complex customs requirements had slowed the process and left them unsure as to how they could compete with local suppliers.

Despite these issues, all of the attendees remained upbeat to some degree about the prospect of entering new, high-growth international markets – regardless of the issues they were currently facing when trading with both EU and non-EU countries.

It is likely that the growing unease businesses are feeling towards trading internationally is due to an uncertain winter ahead with a persistently high Covid-19 case rate, unclear rules regarding both import and export requirements, and continuing shortages of products and labour. All make for a concerning economic environment for businesses hoping to revive themselves after two years of unprecedented challenges.

As such, it is perhaps perfect timing from the Government to release its much-anticipated export strategy, which it hopes will soothe businesses' nerves and inspire confidence in post-Brexit trading. 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' – the Government's new 12-point plan – details the Government's proposals to build the exporting capability of critical sectors, grow the UK's economy, and increase annual exports to £1 trillion – the 'Race to a Trillion' – by the end of this decade.

Throughout the 12 commitments, businesses that are hoping to access export markets and capitalise upon untapped opportunities across the globe are likely to feel inspired by the Government's optimistic post-Brexit approach to international trade.

According to ONS data, exports from businesses in the Greater Birmingham area to non-EU markets have risen, despite businesses reporting the previously mentioned concerns about the growing complexity of international trading. With nearly £13 billion worth of goods exported from the West Midlands in the first three quarters of 2021 alone, it is clear that businesses in Greater Birmingham hoping to launch into international markets will strongly benefit from the Government's renewed focus on helping UK businesses to export their world-class products to all corners of the globe.

The 'Made in the UK, Sold to the World' strategy will no doubt be encouraging for local businesses, with the Department for International Trade outlining the major ways in which firms will be supported – from expanded products and delivery by UK Export Finance to a new Export Support Service – when deciding to export.

However, whilst the strategy is great news for businesses in the region, it is important that the Government can provide clearer details about how businesses can access the opportunities and support outlined throughout the plan in order to maximise their potential on the global stage. Providing the granular level detail that businesses need to shape a long-term export strategy will not only give businesses the reassurance they need that many of their concerns have been recognised and understood, it will undoubtedly provide the confidence they need to expand their overseas reach.