



Department for
Business & Trade

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Dear Chair,

Update on the Department's work on Responsible Business Conduct

Following the launch of the Trade Strategy, and Minister Alexander's letter dated 25 June, I am writing to provide some further details on the announcements related to responsible business conduct and forced labour.

The Trade Strategy makes an important commitment to responsible business conduct, both as a moral imperative and smart business. It acknowledges the critical role that business must play in addressing the adverse impacts on people and planet caused by its activities while contributing positively to the Government's mission to grow the economy.

The Government reaffirmed its expectation that UK businesses should respect human rights and the environment, including conducting risk-based human rights and environmental due diligence. The UK has legislation to combat forced labour in supply chains, including via the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the Companies Act 2006.

Nevertheless, we recognise that concerns continue to be raised, including by your Committee, regarding the effectiveness of the UK's regime in preventing human and labour rights abuses and environmental harms in supply chains. Within a fast-changing international landscape, the Government acknowledges that reforms have been introduced by many of our trading partners including mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence and import controls.

That is why the Department for Business and Trade has:

- Launched a **review of its approach to ensuring responsible business conduct**, focusing on the global supply chains of businesses operating in the UK. Critically, any measures considered will promote a coordinated approach to responsible business issues that minimises administrative costs, consistent with the Prime Minister's commitment to reduce the administrative cost of complying with regulation by 25% over the Parliamentary term.
- Established the **Office for Responsible Business Conduct** to replace the UK's National Contact Point, which is mandated to promote the OECD Guidelines on RBC.

This office will better reflect the importance of its mission and increase its visibility to all stakeholders. It will continue to sit within the Department for Business and Trade, and we will make it as effective as possible in supporting businesses to integrate responsible business practices and help victims of corporate malpractice through continuing to operate a non-judicial complaints mechanism.

- Committed to strengthen cooperation and coordinated action to promote Responsible Business Conduct through **multilateral forums** including the G7 and OECD, because global problems require globally coordinated solutions.

Office for RBC procedures

In line with our longstanding commitments to scrutiny and transparency, I also wish to clarify how we notify the Committee of complaints brought to the ORBC (formerly the UK National Contact Point) against UK enterprises.

ORBC cases have several stages. Once the office receives a complaint that a business has allegedly breached the OECD Guidelines on RBC, a caseworker conducts an Initial Assessment to discern whether the complaint is within scope of the Guidelines and merits further investigation. If accepted at Initial Assessment, the Office will proceed to offer the Parties free professional mediation, and take further evidence from the Parties, culminating in the ORBC publishing a Final Statement on the outcome of the case.

The Office for RBC follows its published Rules of Procedure¹ throughout the process and all ORBC decisions are published on the ORBC website. The Rules of Procedure also state that the Minister will write to the Business and Trade Committee for each Final Statement on the outcome of a case, and deposit copies in the House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries. This is an important part of the process given the parliamentary and public interest in the types of complaints that are raised.

However, my office has identified some historical examples of the Committee being notified of Initial Assessments. Given no judgement is made on a company at the Initial Assessment stage, going forwards we will ensure adherence to the published Rules of Procedure and inform the Committee of cases once they reach the Final Statement stage. We will continue to publish all decisions on our website: [UK National Contact Point - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-responsible-business-conduct).

I welcome the Committee's interest in matters related to responsible business conduct and forced labour and look forward to your continued engagement on these important issues.

Yours sincerely,



George Foster

Chairman, Office for Responsible Business Conduct (ORBC)

¹ [UK national contact point: procedures for complaints brought under the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-responsible-business-conduct)