Department for Business & Trade
HM Treasury

Lord Stockwood
Minister for Investment
Department for Business and Trade &
HM Treasury

Old Admiralty Building
Admiralty Place
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2DY

T: +44 (0) 020 4551 0011
E: Stockwood.correspondence@businessandtrade.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/dbt

The Lord Johnson of Lainston CBE
Chair, International Agreements Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

17 March 2026

Dear Dominic,

Many thanks for your letter of 5 March regarding the current arrangements for enhanced scrutiny of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee for its continued engagement on this essential aspect of the Government's trade programme. This constructive dialogue has been instrumental in ensuring that transparency and effective parliamentary oversight remain central to our work. I recognise the importance that Parliamentarians attach to our statutory and non-statutory commitments, particularly in the context of the recent UK–India FTA and I look forward to the continued discussions in this area.

Further to the assurances provided last year, I am pleased to confirm that the Department for Business and Trade will continue to adhere to the enhanced scrutiny arrangements set out in the 2022 letter between Lord Grimstone, and the then Chair of the International Agreements Committee. These commitments apply to all Free Trade Agreements that require ratification – including those outlined in your letter. These arrangements include, but are not limited to, requirements to:

I. consult on and publish negotiating objectives for new FTAs;
II. facilitate debate on those objectives if requested by parliamentary committees;
III. give written updates during negotiations;
IV. provide committees with private briefings by Chief Negotiators;
V. share the treaty text with committees after signature with explanatory material, and an independently scrutinised Impact Assessment;
VI. allow a reasonable amount of time for scrutiny between publication of the signed FTA and laying under the CRAG Act; and,
VII. facilitate a debate on the FTA "subject to Parliamentary time".

As you will be aware, these arrangements are intended to apply in the context of FTAs[1]. However, the Department is also seeking to conclude a number of more targeted, non-FTA type agreements over the coming year, such as the UK–Switzerland Mutual Recognition Agreement. These agreements are narrower in scope and less comprehensive than full FTAs, and I hope you agree that it is therefore necessary to strike an appropriate balance between enabling effective negotiations in the UK's interests and ensuring parliamentary accountability.

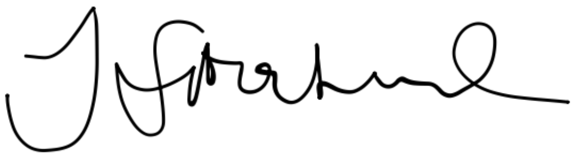
Against this background, our approach will be to apply the spirit of the enhanced scrutiny framework proportionately to such agreements, in order to ensure that effective scrutiny can nevertheless take place.

I hope my letter provides the reassurance that the Department and I take accountability to Parliament very seriously and will continue to do so for the upcoming agreements highlighted in your letter.

The Government will keep our scrutiny arrangements under review to ensure that they remain effective. We will work closely with the International Agreements Committee and Business and Trade Select Committee should we wish to revise or enhance these – though I want to reassure you that the foundation of ensuring robust parliamentary scrutiny will remain paramount throughout. It is through ongoing discussion that we can ensure that our scrutiny framework remains fit for purpose, and I look forward to further engaging with your Committee on this very important issue.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the Business and Trade Committee for awareness, alongside the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and Seema Malhotra, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the FCDO.

With best wishes,



Lord Stockwood of Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes
Minister for Investment
Department for Business and Trade and His Majesty's Treasury

[1] As defined under WTO GATT: [WTO | legal texts - The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947)]