



# International Trade Committee

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Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP  
Secretary of State for International Trade  
Department for International Trade  
Old Admiralty Building  
Admiralty Place  
London  
SW1A 2BL

9 December 2021

Dear Anne-Marie,

I am writing to express my deep regret and considerable frustration that it appears my Committee's requests are not being given appropriate priority, despite your assurances to the contrary.

Following your appointment, I wrote to you about historical issues my Committee had experienced with your department, including around "accommodating requests for ministerial attendance", seeking to improve the relationship.<sup>1</sup> In your response,<sup>2</sup> and subsequently,<sup>3</sup> you expressed a desire to change this, particularly for our scrutiny of new free trade agreements. However, the Committee's remit and interest clearly sits wider than this – undeniably important, but narrower – focus, which is why I recently sought explicit confirmation that "your desire to improve working practices extends [...] to the full remit of your department and my Committee".<sup>4</sup>

The specific issue I want to raise with you here is around ongoing attempts to secure time for a two-hour 'work of DIT' session with you. While attempts to book this session pre-date your appointment, even since then it has not been possible to secure a time your staff would agree. In early October I agreed that, following unsuccessful attempts to find dates in the near future, my Committee could further compromise by offering a date in the further future – 23 February, 10am to midday. This offer was made on the assumption that your diary should be less locked down that far ahead, strictly and explicitly on the condition that this be a firm and immovable commitment. Over the following months, your office has taken an unacceptable amount of time to confirm your availability, and when they did it was with the statement that you could only offer an hour of your time, with no further detail forthcoming, despite repeated requests.

This is not the first time that the Committee's request for your time have been responded to slowly and incompletely, with less time offered than requested. That is

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<sup>1</sup> [Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State relating to her appointment as Trade Secretary, 17 September 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Letter from the Secretary of State to the Chair relating to trade agreement scrutiny, 5 October 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> For example, [Q30](#) and [Q6](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Correspondence from the Chair to the Secretary of State regarding timeliness and information-sharing, dated 29 November 2021](#)

unacceptable and not what my Committee expects of any Secretary of State, much less one who claims to want to improve relations between her department and it.

The remit of your department and this Committee is such that it is not reasonable to attempt to cover it all in just one hour. Given the significant advance notice that was given of the session, I do not consider that there should have been – or now be – any issue with rapidly confirming that you will attend the full session.

You will be aware that Sir Bernard Jenkin, as Chair of the Liaison Committee, has written to the Leader of the House about the issue of ministerial attendance across committees.<sup>5</sup> In the letter, Sir Bernard notes that:

It is of course the case that sometimes Ministerial business will mean that attendance on a particular date is not possible. In such a circumstance it should be a priority for the Minister to find an alternative date in the immediate future, if necessary at the expense of other commitments.

While I understand a response to Sir Bernard's letter still pending to this, given my Committee's above situation I deemed it necessary to follow up on our specific issue with you directly in the meantime.

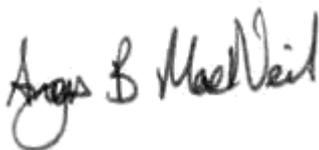
Please can you confirm that you will prioritise the requested appearance before my Committee on Wednesday 23 February, for two hours from 10am, and instruct your staff to be more forthcoming and timely in responding to future requests.

It must not to be the case that my Committee, in seeking to be helpfully reasonable and flexible, continues to be taken advantage of and put off. Nor should it to be necessary for me to escalate requests for ministerial time to public complaints in order to seek appropriate responses – though I will continue to do so as long as it proves necessary.

I anticipate that this is a simple matter of you agreeing that the Committee's request is reasonable, and directing your private office to free up the necessary time, so would be grateful for a reply before the House rises for recess next week.

In accordance with our usual practice, this letter, along with any replies, will be published on the Committee's webpage.

Kind regards,



Angus Brendan MacNeil  
Chair of the International Trade Committee

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<sup>5</sup> [Letter from the Liaison Committee Chair to the Leader of the House regarding expectation of Select Committees in relation to Ministerial engagement, 30 November](#)