

# Weekly policy update from the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

*A round-up of key policy changes from the past seven days (3-9 April 2025)*

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## **£13.9 Billion R&D Funding Announced**

On 4 April, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) announced the allocation of £13.9 billion for research and development (R&D) over the next year. This funding aims to drive transformational research in life sciences, green energy, and engineering. The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will receive £8.8 billion to support projects like developing advanced wind turbine testing facilities and enhancing satellite communications.

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## **Ban on Fake Reviews and Hidden Fees Implemented**

New consumer protection laws came into force on 6 April, banning fake reviews and hidden fees. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) now has the authority to enforce these regulations, which aim to save consumers £2.2 billion annually. All mandatory fees must be included in the headline price, preventing deceptive pricing practices. The legislation also targets fake reviews, ensuring consumers can trust online ratings. These measures are expected to enhance transparency, protect consumers, and create a fairer business marketplace.

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## AI Energy Council Launch

On 8 April, the UK Government launched the AI Energy Council to ensure the country's energy infrastructure is prepared for the AI revolution. Co-chaired by the Technology and Energy Secretaries, the council's first meeting focused on integrating sustainable energy solutions with AI and compute infrastructure. Industry leaders from energy and technology sector representatives discussed strategies to enhance energy efficiency and sustainability. The council aims to support economic growth, create jobs, and ensure the secure adoption of AI across the UK's energy network.

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## UK-India Economic Dialogue

On 9 April, the UK and India announced £400 million in trade and investment wins during the 13th UK-India Economic and Financial Dialogue. The initiative aims to boost economic growth and security by strengthening ties across various sectors, including defence, financial services, and education. The dialogue focused on enhancing cooperation and securing a Free Trade Agreement and Bilateral Investment Treaty.

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## Environmental Permit Reforms

On 8 April, the UK and Welsh Governments launched a consultation on reforms to environmental permitting regulations. These changes aim to streamline processes for regulators, such as the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales, to expedite decisions and reduce delays for businesses. The reforms include simplifying procedures for land use, flood risk activities, and scaffolding near rivers while maintaining stringent safeguards against environmental harm.

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## **Companies House Begins Identity Verification**

On 8 April, Companies House launched a new identity verification service as part of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023. This initiative aims to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the companies register by requiring directors, persons with significant control, and those filing information to verify their identities. The voluntary period for identity verification is now open, with mandatory compliance expected by autumn 2025.

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## **Government Publishes Second Transformation Consultation Response**

On 10 April, the UK Government published its response to the second transformation consultation by the Intellectual Property Office (IPO). The consultation, which ran from August to October 2023, proposed changes to streamline IPO services, including trade mark, design, and tribunal services. Key outcomes include the online publication of trade mark and design documents, simplification of trade mark applications, and the introduction of mediation for disputes.

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## **London Luton Airport Expansion Approved**

On 3 April, the Secretary of State for Transport granted development consent for the expansion of London Luton Airport. The project will increase the airport's capacity from 18 million passengers annually to 32 million. The expansion includes new terminal capacity, additional taxiways, landside support buildings, and surface access adjustments. The decision follows a thorough examination process involving public and statutory consultations.

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## Regulation of Small Private Equity Firms and Hedge Funds

The UK Government plans to reduce regulation for smaller private equity and hedge funds to boost investment and growth. The Treasury is expected to lift the threshold at which asset managers must comply with the main rules for the sector from £100 million to £5 billion. City Minister Emma Reynolds stated that this change would alleviate "costly regulation that prevents asset management firms from growing and provide capital for businesses across the country to grow."

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## Update on UK-South Korea Free Trade Agreement

On 8 April, Trade Policy Minister Douglas Alexander updated Parliament on the progress of free trade agreement negotiations with South Korea. The fourth round of the talks, held in London from March 10 to 21, focused on enhancing trade relations and securing future market access. Key discussion areas included digital trade, rules of origin, services, and business mobility. The negotiations aim to support economic growth and strengthen the strategic partnership between the UK and South Korea.

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## UK Government R&D Expenditure Increases

On 9 April, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that the UK government's net expenditure on research and development (R&D) rose to £17.4 billion in 2023, up from £16.1 billion in 2022. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) contributed £6.3 billion, accounting for 36.2% of the total expenditure. The increase supports various sectors, including science, engineering, and technology, aiming to drive innovation and economic growth.

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## Employment Support Programme Launched in West London

On 9 April, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced the rollout of the Connect to Work programme, starting with a £40 million investment in West London. This initiative aims to support disabled individuals and those with health conditions in finding employment. The programme will provide tailored support, including one-to-one employment advice and skills development, to help up to 3,500 people in West London over the next five years.

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