

## PRIME MINISTER KEIR STARMER'S VISIT TO CHINA, 28-31 JANUARY 2026

Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited China between 28-31 January, accompanied by Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle and Economic Secretary to the Treasury Lucy Rigby, as well as a delegation of 54 business and cultural organisation representatives, to hold a series of meetings with senior Chinese leaders. The visit featured a busy programme of events alongside the meetings, intended to highlight the huge potential of the UK-China commercial and cultural relationship.

### WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY

Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Beijing in the late afternoon, becoming the first British PM to visit China since Theresa May in January 2018.

The first day included two meetings between senior officials: **Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle met with Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, while UK National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell met Foreign Minister Wang Yi.**

### THURSDAY 29 JANUARY

#### ***Meeting with President Xi Jinping***

The PM began the day with a meeting with President Xi Jinping. The PM's opening statement called for a "more sophisticated relationship" with China.

On the Chinese side, President Xi stated, "China and Britain should enhance dialogue and co-operation in order to maintain world peace and stability, while promoting the economy and people's livelihoods of both countries."

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Starmer stated it was a "good productive session with real, concrete outcomes" and established "a real strengthening of the relationship."

#### ***Meeting with Premier Li Qiang***

In the early afternoon, the Prime Minister met with Premier Li Qiang. In his opening statement, Starmer said, "it is in our common interests to find ways to work together – this is our longstanding position." The PM also welcomed plans to make it easier for British companies to do business in China, including through a new services partnership.

According to Xinhua, during the meeting itself, Premier Li highlighted exchanges and alignment in financial regulation and market connectivity, as well as co-operation in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence, energy, manufacturing and shipping.

### ***UK-China Business Council***

A highlight of the day was the 2026 UK-China Business Council, for which CBBC was honoured to be appointed secretariat for the UK council members. The council, attended by more than 100 representatives from governments, enterprises, and associations.

The first session featured three panels on individual aspects of UK-China trade: **Trade in Goods**, **Trade in Services**, and **Investment**. The closing session then featured speeches by PM Keir Starmer and Premier Li Qiang.

### ***Financial Services Roundtable***

The People's Bank of China and His Majesty's Treasury, led by Economic Secretary Lucy Rigby, held a **financial services roundtable** with representatives of British financial services companies, the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Chinese financial regulators on advancing co-operation between the two countries.

- The Bank of China's London Branch has been named the UK's second renminbi clearing bank, strengthening London's cross-border finance infrastructure.
- Agreements were reached for collaboration in innovative financing initiatives, such as RMB-denominated biodiversity bonds, to support green finance.
- Technical discussions focused on financial stability and regulatory cooperation

Additionally, members of the business delegation conducted a **site visit of JD.com's headquarters** in the morning, with CBBC Vice Chair Gordon Orr among the group.

## **FRIDAY 30 JANUARY**

### ***UK-China Business Forum***

The third day of the Prime Minister's visit to China began with the UK-China Business Forum, held in the Atrium of the Bank of China's head office in Beijing.

The PM provided opening remarks and held meetings with representatives from Chinese and British businesses, including Chery, POP MART, CATL, HiTHIUM, and Mingyang.

Alongside the main forum, Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle attended a session on Driving UK-China Regional Opportunities, with senior regional

leaders from both the UK and China. The session focused on increasing understanding of the opportunities available in local regions from both countries.

### ***Shanghai and House of UK Reception***

In the afternoon, the PM and delegation flew to Shanghai. The day's activities concluded with the PM and delegation joining the 'House of UK' Reception, attended by over 300 representatives of British and Chinese businesses headquartered in Shanghai.

## **SATURDAY 31 JANUARY**

The final day of the Prime Minister's tour involved a whirlwind tour of Shanghai's key sites between a meeting with Shanghai Party Secretary (PS) Chen Jining and a tour of the Design Innovation Institute, where he was joined by actress Rosamund Pike.

### ***Meeting with Shanghai Party Secretary Chen Jining***

The PM met Shanghai PS Chen Jining, accompanied by 23 CEOs from the business delegation and Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle.

- The UK side has not yet released an official recap. The Chinese readout noted the PM also expressed his desire for expanded co-operation in areas such as finance, technology, culture, creativity, and addressing climate change.
- According to the Chinese meeting readout, PS Chen's comments aligned with those of the PM: he emphasised the two sides' "complementary advantages" in financial services, biomedicine and green development, while calling for deepened exchanges in culture, creative fields, and education.

### ***Visit to Shanghai's Design Innovation Institute***

In the morning, the Prime Minister visited the Design Innovation Institute with actress Rosamund Pike and National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company representatives.

The visit aligned with the growing popularity of British theatre in China, with both companies recently enjoying success in the country. The PM added their success "showcases the strength and appeal of our world-leading creative industries."

### ***UK China Business Forum Shanghai***

Also in the morning, Secretary of State Peter Kyle attended the UK-China Business Forum Shanghai. CBBC jointly hosted the event with BritCham Shanghai. Over 220 British and Chinese company representatives were present. CBBC Chair Sir Sebastian Wood KCMG and the Secretary of State provided opening remarks, stating there are abundant opportunities for expanding business between the UK and China, given the complementarities between the strategic economic aims of both nations.

The Forum hosted three panels on how to advance commercial ties with China, complemented by a fireside chat between AstraZeneca CEO Pascal Soriot and CBBC CEO Peter Burnett.

- Speaking on the first panel, Peter Kyle highlighted the complementarity between the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and China's 15th Five-Year Plan, while encouraging businesses to take advantage of the deals and positive momentum the visit has produced over the next 12 months.
- During the fireside chat, Soriot emphasised that British businesses should do more than just sell to China, and that success relies on contributing more via training and other forms of collaboration.

### ***PM Departs After Delegation Lunch***

In a final UK government statement, the PM said, “We are bringing stability, clarity and a long-term strategy to how we engage with China, so we can bring home the benefits for businesses and for working people. Engaging with China, is how we secure growth for British businesses, support good jobs at home, and protect our national security.”

The PM subsequently published a [Substack essay](#) in which he provided a broad overview of the aims and outcomes of the visit. An additional video recounting the key outcomes of the visit can be found [here](#).

## **GOVERNMENT AGREEMENTS**

The visit saw the UK government secure a wide range of important deals and wins for British businesses.

- The headline announcement was the securing of visa-free travel for British citizens for stays under 30 days.
- The whisky tariff will be reduced from 10% to 5%, worth an estimated £250 million over five years to UK exporters.

These wins were accompanied by 10 additional cooperation agreements announcements. The UK government's full list can be found [here](#), while below we highlight the key agreements:

- 1. Establishment of a Bilateral Services Partnership.** The MoU is “a commitment to deepen practical government co-operation to increase market access for services firms.”
- 2. Joint Feasibility Study for a UK-China Trade in Services Agreement.** Such an agreement would be the first of its kind and provide a major boost for British service companies seeking to operate in China.
- 3. Exports from the UK to China.** A co-operation mechanism for “Export to China,” that explores the export potential of high-quality UK goods and services to China.

- 4. Strengthening the Work of the UK-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission.** The MoU will “enhance interactions between JETCO and the China-UK Entrepreneurs Committee, and strengthen government-to-business dialogue.

In addition to these agreements, the Department of Business & Trade noted a series of other market access outcomes here.

## COMPANY SIGNINGS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The visit provided an ideal platform for British companies to announce MoUs and agreements with Chinese counterparts. A full list can be found [here](#).

- AstraZeneca announced £10.9 billion in investment to expand R&D programmes and advanced manufacturing in China.
- Octopus Energy, the UK’s largest domestic power supplier, announced entry into China via an agreement with PCG Power for a Chinese power trading platform.
- UK investment management company Schroders announced an agreement with Chinese-battery producer CATL for the launch of a €1 billion energy storage investment platform in Europe.
- Leading energy storage manufacturer HiTHIUM will invest £200 million and create 300 high-quality jobs in energy storage.
- In life sciences, Asymchem announced a major expansion of its UK operations - creating 150 highly skilled jobs over the next five years in advanced R&D and next-generation manufacturing.

The variety of deals underlines that, whether in consolidating the UK’s leading role in life sciences or energy, or building on our world-class cultural soft power, the visit has demonstrated the huge potential of the UK-China commercial relationship.

The China-Britain Business Council was also pleased to announce two agreements for deepened co-operation with Chinese organisations.

- CBBC signed an MoU with the Suzhou New District to develop the Sino-UK Business & Innovation Hub, providing an important platform and entry point for the expansion of UK businesses into the Chinese market.
- CBBC and JD.com reached an agreement to support the onboarding of British brands onto the JINGDONG Cross-Border platform.