



*Theresa May hopes Britain will be a world leader in trade*Credit: Frank Augstein/AP

G20: Theresa May in talks over a free trade deal with Australia after Brexit

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Theresa May is to open talks on landmark new free trade deal with Australia, as she declares Britain will lead the world in global commerce outside the European Union.

The Prime Minister will meet her Australian counterpart, Malcolm Turnbull, at [the G20 summit in China](#) on Monday to shape the broad outline of what would be Britain's first new trade pact after Brexit.

She is expected to explore further trade opportunities in talks with Barack Obama and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the two-day gathering of world leaders.





Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will meet Mrs May at the summitCredit: Reuters

She will also meet China's President Xi Jinping for the first time, and will attempt to soothe relations with China which were damaged after her decision to pause the Chinese-backed Hinkley Point nuclear power plant project.

On Sunday, Mrs May insisted it was “a golden era for UK-China relations”, reviving the ornate rhetoric that both the British and Chinese governments used during Mr Xi’s state visit to Britain last year.

Mrs May’s efforts to make Britain a “great trading nation” received a further boost with news that Australia, New Zealand and Canada will lend the government their own expert trade negotiators.

At present, the UK has a desperate shortage of officials who are trained in negotiating trade agreements because all such deals affecting Britain have been drafted centrally in Brussels for decades.

These specialist negotiators will be critical to Britain’s hopes of striking a good exit deal from the EU in Brussels, as well as forging fresh trade pacts with other countries around the world.





Mrs May will meet Presidents Xi and Obama for the first time as PM at the G20

Speaking ahead of the summit - her first major appearance on the world stage as Prime Minister - Mrs May declared that the talks with Australia showed Britain was “open for business”.

“As a bold, confident, outward-looking country, we’ll be playing a key role on the world stage,” she said.

“I’ll be talking to other world leaders about the opportunities for trade around the globe that will open up for Britain following Brexit. My ambition for Britain is that we should be a global leader in free trade.”

The trade success comes as Mrs May used her first major broadcast interview since becoming Prime Minister to rule out a snap general election before 2020.

In the interview, to be broadcast on BBC One on Sunday, she warned that Britain faced “difficult times” ahead, despite a succession of better-than-expected economic figures in recent days.

The Prime Minister insisted that controls on migration from the EU would be a vital part of her exit deal with Brussels.

David Davis, the new Brexit Secretary, will make a statement to MPs this week outlining the Government’s emerging position on the terms of withdrawal, she added.

Mrs May’s visit to China is her biggest international test since becoming Prime Minister in July, in the aftermath of Britain’s vote to leave the EU in the referendum on June 23. She hopes to use the gathering to reassure world leaders that Britain will still be a “dependable” partner for business after Brexit.

During the summit, Mrs May will hold her first face-to-face meeting with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, an occasion regarded as a critical test of nerve for a new leader.



Vladimir Putin will be an early test for the Prime Minister
Credit: Ivan Sekretarev/EPA

At a key discussion on the world economy, Mrs May will use a lengthy speaking slot to champion Britain’s credentials as trading nation and set out her vision of the future for the country after Brexit.

The Prime Minister said: “We are going to make a success of Brexit and one way we will do that is by playing to Britain’s strengths as a great trading nation and forging our own new trade deals around the world.

“We are building up the necessary expertise to go after these trade deals and here in China. I will be seizing the opportunity to talk to leaders from countries like Australia who have already made clear that they want to strike a deal once we have left the EU.”



Dr Liam Fox, the International Trade Secretary
Credit: Paul Grover/Telegraph

Liam Fox, the International Trade Secretary, has already spoken to his Australian counterpart, Steven Ciobo, and the pair will meet in London for further exploratory talks on a deal this week.

Speaking to the Telegraph, Mr Ciobo said he would be happy to lend Britain trade negotiators to help the UK build its own capacity for striking commercial deals with other countries.

British government officials will hold talks in Canberra this week with their Australian counterparts about establishing a trade negotiating team. New Zealand and Canada have also offered the British Government their expertise.

Mrs May is being accompanied in China by Philip Hammond, the Chancellor, and Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England.

Also with her is her chief of staff Nick Timothy, whose highly critical comments about plans for Chinese investment in the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant preceded Mrs May's controversial decision to halt the project.

In an article before he took up his Downing St post, Mr Timothy said MI5 believed China was working against British interests, and raised serious security concerns about Chinese involvement in the £18 billion Hinkley project.

Mrs May will hold her first meetings with Mr Xi once the summit is formally over, on Monday, but she is not expected to offer him any assurances that the Hinkley deal will go ahead.

The Prime Minister tried to play down the Hinkley row ahead of the summit.

She said: "This is a golden era for UK-China relations and one of the things I'll be doing at the G20 is obviously talking to President Xi

about how we can develop the strategic partnership that we have between the UK and China."

She told the BBC she was still looking at the the evidence and listening to advice on whether to proceed with the new nuclear power plant in Somerset.

"As Home Secretary in the past, of course, and as Prime Minister, national security is a key issue for us. But in terms of that individual decision I'll be looking at all aspects of it and come to a decision in September," she said.

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