

UK businesses urge Government to prioritise trade certainty

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Government leaders across the globe have adopted different negotiation tactics to the sweeping trade tariffs imposed by the Trump administration, with varying degrees of success. The approach taken by the UK Government to secure a deal early on appears to be supported by UK Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

A new study called “International Tariff Turmoil: How Global trade policy is rewriting UK SME finance strategy”, which surveyed 250 UK Finance Decision-Makers (FDMs), has found that almost half (45%) support the Government’s emphasis on diplomacy and negotiation over retaliatory tariffs.

The research commissioned by [CPiO](#), one of the UK’s longest-standing Sage partners, shows that finance leaders of UK SMEs are clear about what they want from Westminster: clarity, coordination and competitive access to markets.

Key findings include:

- 44% say they need clearer, more timely guidance as tariff frameworks shift
- 39% want tailored support for industries like steel and automotive
- 37% are asking for financial support or subsidised training to offset disruption

Considering the UK Government has recently guaranteed a £1.5bn loan for Jaguar Land Rover after it suffered a cyberattack, what these findings underline is that finance leaders are not necessarily calling for handouts when it comes to managing the impact of tariffs, but for smarter policymaking. What’s more,

almost half (48%) would encourage the Government to pursue free-trade agreements to open up new markets to support UK manufacturers in responding to the pressures of changing international trade tariffs.

There is also a strong call (44%) for clear and timely guidance for industry to align with changing schedules, underlining the long-held perception that, irrespective of which party is in government, businesses need more clarity and earlier insight into the effects of changes.

Andrew Watkinson, Managing Director at CPiO, said, “The research paints a picture of pragmatism among UK SME finance leaders. They’re not calling for subsidies or protectionist measures, but for smarter policymaking, one that puts long-term trade certainty ahead of short-term political posturing. Retaliatory tariffs may grab headlines, but they rarely provide the stability manufacturers and distributors need to plan and invest with confidence.”

For many SMEs, the uncertainty surrounding tariffs is proving just as damaging as the tariffs themselves. From Brexit to energy shocks, a lack of early communication from the Government has repeatedly left businesses struggling to plan effectively.

“The research reinforces the longstanding perception that businesses require earlier insights and stronger collaboration with policymakers to remain competitive in global markets,” added Watkinson.

The CPiO research shows how tariff disruption is weighing heavily on UK SMEs. Findings reveal that 68% of finance leaders report a high impact on short- and medium-term investment plans, 56% have suffered up to a 40% reduction in their sales pipeline, and 70% cite increased supply chain risks since tariffs were introduced.

Watkinson concludes, “What finance decision-makers want is clarity, early guidance and proactive government engagement. With supply chains under pressure and investment decisions on hold, the cost of uncertainty is already visible. Greater certainty in trade policy could unlock resilience and competitiveness at a time when UK SMEs need it most.”