Report

- **Date of Event:** October 16, 2026
- **Location:** German Business Hub, 42 Essex Street, Temple, London WC2R 3JF
- **Sponsors:** MIC GmbH (Premium Sponsor), PASANI Academy GmbH (Sponsor), Customs Manager (Manager)

Executive Summary

The inaugural German-British Customs Summit 2026 served as an important moment for commercial, regulatory, and operational relations between the United Kingdom and Germany. Operating across UK-German and wider European trade corridors has become increasingly complex, requiring more than reactive logistics. Shifting regulatory landscapes, heightened compliance enforcement, and sweeping digital customs transformations require a forward-looking, strategic approach.

Trade leaders, government representatives, trade associations, international trade leaders, the legal and academic profession, supply chain directors, and customs practitioners attended this summit. By convening top-tier policymakers, industry pioneers, legal experts, and corporate compliance officers under one roof and bridging physical attendance in London with an active global online delegation, the summit provided a unique platform for peer-to-peer learning, high-level debate, and actionable operational insights in the customs relationship between the UK, Germany and the EU.

About The Summit, Goals and Objectives

Held on October 16, 2026, at the German Business Hub in London, the inaugural German-British Customs Summit operated as a premier business-focused forum designed to improve understanding of customs and trade compliance requirements affecting companies operating between the United Kingdom, Germany, and the wider European market.

Organised by **Customs Manager Ltd.** alongside partner organisations and backed by premium **sponsor MIC GmbH** and sponsor **PASANI Academy GmbH**, the summit successfully united businesses, practitioners, and public authorities. To maximise engagement, the event included live polling and virtual participation channels for both in-person and online audiences.

The summit's core purpose was to **facilitate the exchange of practical business experience, deepen understanding of customs processes, compliance obligations, and operational requirements, and help companies identify practical approaches to managing cross-border trade**.

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Additionally, it provided **an essential platform for stakeholders to explain developments within their respective areas of responsibility and strengthen professional dialogue and mutual understanding across the international trade community**.

As established in its foundational framework, the summit was strictly **educational and informational**. It functioned as a non-decision-making body, did not formulate policy recommendations, did not seek to influence legislative processes, and did not represent any common UK-German position on matters falling within the competence of the European Union, its Member States, or the United Kingdom.

Summit Participation and Sectoral Reach

The inaugural German-British Customs Summit 2026 attracted strong cross-border engagement, recording 80 registrations representing 58 distinct companies and 22 specialized customs practitioners.

Reflecting the complex realities of modern bilateral trade, delegates and participating organizations spanned 10 core sectors:

1. Logistics, Freight Forwarding & Customs Clearance: Freight forwarding, supply chain solutions, and dedicated customs clearance services.
2. Trade Compliance & Software Licensing: Trade compliance consulting, regulatory support, and advanced software licensing solutions.
3. Education & Training: Professional education, skills development, and specialized training programs.
4. Automotive & Aircraft: Manufacturing, component supply, maintenance, and related services across automotive and aerospace sectors.
5. Consumer Goods: Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), retail operations, and consumer products.
6. Industrial Manufacturing: Heavy industrial manufacturing, engineering, and advanced production technologies.
7. Chemicals: Chemical manufacturing, specialty chemicals, and related industrial services.
8. Agriculture: Agricultural production, agri-technology, and food supply chains.
9. Environmental Services: Environmental solutions, waste management, and sustainability services.
10. International Business Advisory: Global trade advisory, market entry support, and international business consulting.

Opening Plenary: Setting the Vision for Bilateral Trade

The summit began at the German Business Hub in London, welcoming attendees with French viennoiseries and fresh coffee and setting a collaborative, professional tone.

Arne Mielken (Organising Committee of the German-British Customs Summit & CEO of Customs Manager Ltd.) opened the summit by emphasising the critical need for structured dialogue between businesses, practitioners, and public authorities. He underscored that as customs procedures evolve, maintaining open channels of communication across borders is paramount for economic resilience.

Philip Trouwen, Sales Manager Europe at MIC GmbH and the event's main sponsor, highlighted the indispensable role of digital transformation and automated trade management solutions in modern supply chains. He noted that technology is no longer a luxury but the backbone of reliable cross-border compliance.

Lars Gemp, Chairman of the European Forum of Foreign Trade (EFA), Germany, delivered pre-recorded welcome remarks. Mr Gemp stressed the enduring strength of the German-British economic partnership and the vital role that trade associations play in navigating regulatory divergence.

Andrew Marsden, MStJ, Master-Elect, Worshipful Company of World Traders, brought a historic and global trading perspective to the summit, emphasising London's enduring position as a premier international trade hub

and the need to cultivate expert commercial stewardship.

Michael Schmidt, President of the British Chamber of Commerce in Germany (BCCG), focused on the practical realities faced by bilateral enterprises, reinforcing the BCCG's commitment to fostering frictionless trade and supporting business growth across both nations, stressing "pragmatism" and the need to explore the art of the feasible.

Keynote: The Evolving Trade Environment: What Businesses Need to Know

Graham Ziegner, Head of our North and West EU Member States Team, UK Department of Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST), delivered a high-level strategic roadmap addressing current joint initiatives between the UK and Germany led by the Department of Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST), highlighting the strong economic partnership and steady trade between both countries.

He emphasised that closer dialogue and cooperation help provide a solid framework for businesses working across these markets. He recalled Trade Minister Lord Anas Sarwar keynote address at the annual German British Business Summit (the day before) to stress a new era of economic cooperation, placing strong strategic emphasis on the absolute necessity of maintaining open and fully integrated supply chains across borders.
Mr Ziegler stressed that closer bilateral ties and collaborative frameworks are vital to navigate modern economic headwinds and ensure long-term economic stability. He then made a compelling case for the UK's inclusion in Brussels' 'Made in Europe' procurement scheme, arguing that British participation is essential for fostering mutual growth, supporting industry groups, and bolstering cross-border industrial competitiveness alongside European partners.

Morning Session: What is Changing in Customs & What Deserves Your Attention?

Customs operations across the UK-German corridor evolved rapidly amid new regulatory requirements, digital processes, and heightened compliance expectations.

The summit's morning session brought together leading German and British customs thought leaders to examine key developments shaping bilateral trade, focusing on procedures, data and documentation, supply chain coordination, compliance management, and operational efficiency.

10:20 – 11:00 | PART 1: Perspectives on "What is Changing in Customs & What Deserves Your Attention"

Prof. Dr Hans-Michael Wolffgang, Head of the Institute and Founder and partner of AWB International, and Professor of international trade and tax law and Head of the Institute of Customs and International Trade Law (ICTL) in Münster, Germany, opened by highlighting the robust state of bilateral commerce, noting €80.2 billion in German exports to the UK and €38.6 billion in imports for 202, and referenced the July 2025 Kensington Treaty on friendship and cooperation, which ensured no border changes.

His presentation had two parts:

Part I: How German Customs Works

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- Rules vs Enforcement: He explained that while the EU establishes the legal framework (including the Union Customs Code, tariff, value, origin, and the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement [TCA]), Germany is responsible for national enforcement, organisation, appeals, courts, and criminal tax law.
- Institutional Setup: He detailed the structure of German customs under the Federal Ministry of Finance and the Central Customs Authority in Bonn, managing around 49,000 staff and €157 billion in revenue across main, local, and investigation offices, with a new Customs 2030 structure slated for 2027.
- The Reality of Border Controls: Emphasising that border physical checks are rare exceptions (with only 0.0082% of products checked across 345 million EU import declarations in 2024), he stressed that "compliance is decided in your accounts – not at the border."
- Practical Checklist for UK Businesses: He outlined key operational steps for UK traders, including appointing an indirect representative with an EU EORI number, ensuring origin proof for TCA preferences, utilising the English-language Zoll service (enquiries.english@zoll.de), and making early, complete self-disclosures if errors occur.

Part II: The EU Customs Reform & Bilateral Interfaces

- The Reform Timeline: Professor Wolffgang unpacked Regulation (EU) 2026/2108, detailing key milestones such as the establishment of the EU Customs Authority, the rollout of the EU Data Hub for e-commerce (2027), the abolition of the €150 customs exemption (July 2028), and the full transition to the Data Hub and Trust & Check Trader framework by March 2034.
- Three Major Shifts: He analysed the German perspective on the reform, highlighting the dual burden of national enforcement alongside the new EU Data Hub, stricter common EU penalty rules (up to 6% for e-commerce plus German criminal law), and timing overlaps with the Customs 2030 reorganisation.
- Interfaces with German-UK Trade: He flagged critical operational hurdles, noting that the Trust & Check Trader (TCT) status is not currently covered by the TCA, that UK e-commerce platforms face EU importer liabilities, and that dual data environments require keeping EU and UK processes strictly separated ("two tracks").
- Bridging Academia and Industry: He concluded by emphasising the vital role of monitoring rule-by-rule developments, fostering bilateral forums (such as the Kensington Forum and TCA committees), and investing in specialised training covering law, language, and culture.

Syed Khaja Mohi Moinuddin MBE, Senior Policy Advisor, International Customs Agreements, HM Revenue & Customs (Borders and Trade). Lead adviser on Customs Cooperation and Mutual Assistance frameworks **then** delivered remarks examining the mechanics of bilateral administrative collaboration, regulatory alignment, and international customs frameworks governing trade between the United Kingdom and European partners, with a specific focus on the UK-German corridor.

Part I: Customs Cooperation and Administrative Frameworks

- **Legal and Administrative Architecture:** Mr Moinuddin detailed the foundational architecture of international customs agreements, explaining how bilateral and plurilateral frameworks provide the legal basis for mutual assistance, intelligence sharing, and administrative cooperation between UK and EU customs authorities.
- **Streamlining Operational Channels:** He addressed how HMRC is actively working to streamline communication channels and administrative procedures with European counterparts to

reduce friction for legitimate traders while maintaining robust regulatory oversight.

- **Mutual Assistance in Enforcement:** He emphasised the mechanics of Customs Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (CCMA) provisions, outlining how authorities collaborate on anti-fraud measures, irregular trade detection, investigation of customs offences, and the recovery of customs duties and taxes across borders.
- **Practical Guidance for Traders:** He offered clear guidance for businesses engaging in bilateral trade, stressing that proactive engagement with HMRC administrative guidance, maintaining meticulous audit trails, and understanding mutual assistance obligations help traders navigate complex compliance checks smoothly.

Part II: Enhancing Transparency and Trade Facilitation

- **Transparency as a Compliance Pillar:** Unpacking HMRC's strategic priorities, Mr Moinuddin highlighted the crucial role of regulatory transparency in fostering a predictable trading environment. He discussed how accessible administrative guidance and transparent policy implementation directly reduce compliance costs for businesses operating across the UK-German corridor.

- **Bridging Public Authorities and Industry:** He analysed the evolving dialogue between government agencies and commercial operators, emphasising that structured forums like the summit are essential for aligning public enforcement goals with commercial realities.

- **Future-Proofing Border Operations:** He explored ongoing efforts to modernise border processes, leveraging digital data sharing and enhanced inter-agency cooperation to support secure, frictionless trade flows.

- **Strategic Collaboration:** He concluded by reinforcing that enduring economic partnership relies on continuous dialogue between HMRC, German customs authorities, and industry stakeholders, ensuring that regulatory frameworks adapt effectively to modern trade demands.

PART 2: Extended Boardroom Discussion (In Person & Online)

Following the thought leadership presentation, the Boardroom discussion was extended. Key Points:

- **Prof. Dr Hans-Michael Wolffgang** cautioned traders against getting distracted by procedural minutiae, reiterating that compliance is ultimately decided in corporate accounts and internal data systems rather than at physical border checkpoints. He urged businesses to focus heavily on data accuracy, origin documentation, and adapting to upcoming EU and UK digital structures.
- **Graham Ziegner** emphasised that BIST is highly interested in and supportive of improving trade relations between the UK, Germany, and the EU, and welcomes forums such as this to support ongoing discussion.
- **Syed Khaja Mohi Moinuddin MBE** explained the importance and benefits of close, open stakeholder engagement and said the customs-business partnership, in the form of the JCCC, is a flagship collaboration that fosters better understanding and trust between HMRC and stakeholders.
- **Arne Mielken** warned that if customs issues are overlooked, German and British businesses will continue to face unnecessary border friction and high costs. He emphasised that while trade

between the two nations is growing, customs red tape cannot be brushed aside simply because individual countries claim they lack authority to discuss it. While fully respecting and acknowledging that the European Union has exclusive competence to set customs laws and policy, Mr Mielken questioned where the boundaries lie for individual Member States (like Germany) when dealing with UK-specific customs matters. He asked:

  - Can British businesses flag unclear national customs processes directly with German customs authorities (apart from the general helpline)?
  - How should UK businesses handle the language barrier if they must discuss complex customs matters only in German, or if German businesses must do so in English?
  - Can the UK and individual EU member states collaborate on practical initiatives, such as a "British–European Joint Rules of Origin Tracker" to make Free Trade Agreement rules easier for traders to understand?
  - Could an EU-UK Joint Trade Contact Group or a combined "JCCC-EU" (Joint Customs Consultative Committee) be formed, and would Germany support or champion this idea at the EU level?

In short, Mr Mielken challenged the room with a fundamental question: Within the current legal framework, exactly what is Germany allowed to do and say in its direct bilateral engagement with the UK?

- **Michael Schmidt** brought the perspective of bilateral enterprises, highlighting that regulatory changes are increasingly driven by the need for legal certainty, administrative predictability, and reduced friction across European supply chains. He encouraged the group to consider practical solutions, noting that significant friction still plagues the EU-UK-DE trade system. He suggested that celebrating growing trade between our nations misses the mark if leaders fail to address the primary source of friction: customs processes that inflate costs and make trade unnecessarily expensive. Urging delegates to think outside the box, he challenged the room to examine concrete, real-world measures to streamline procedures.

- **Andrew Marsden MStJ** contributed a broader commercial stewardship view, noting that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face disproportionate operational challenges when navigating multi-jurisdictional customs obligations, reinforcing the need for professional education and expert guidance.

The group then debated upcoming regulatory milestones, such as the phased rollout of the EU Customs Reform, data hub transitions, and evolving e-commerce liabilities. Experts warned that businesses that fail to establish dual-track data management and strong internal governance risk severe financial and operational disruptions in the coming months.

Contributors stressed the importance of engaging proactively with official guidance channels, maintaining rigorous audit trails, and using digital trade management tools to stay ahead of enforcement shifts.

Lunch - Middle Temple Hall

In-person participants enjoyed a buffet lunch under the sensational double hammerbeam roof, dating back to 1573, while Online participants kept learning over lunch with an exclusive customs masterclass, livestreamed on YouTube and joined by Customs Manager Ltd., bringing the day's customs discussions to life.

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Afternoon Session: What Works (and What Doesn't) in Daily Customs Operations?

The afternoon session moved beyond theory to examine the practical realities of managing customs and trade operations across complex supply chains.

Senior trade professionals shared first-hand experiences, candid perspectives, and lessons learned regarding what truly works in day-to-day operations.

Discussions focused heavily on controlling customs costs, strengthening compliance, and leveraging technology effectively, with panellists exploring the key decisions, processes, and controls that make a measurable difference.

Ultimately, the session gave attendees actionable insights, candid discussions, and practical ideas to take back to their organisations.

PART 1: Four Perspectives on "What Works (and What Doesn't) in Daily Customs Operations?

The afternoon session opened with four senior trade professionals sharing their hands-on experience in managing customs compliance, controlling costs, maintaining resilient supply chains, and adapting to rapidly changing requirements through real-world examples and case studies. The discussions covered compliance management, trade data and documentation, operational challenges, technology and automation, organisational preparedness, and practical lessons learned.

The presentations were delivered by:

- **William Bain**, Head of Trade Policy at British Chambers of Commerce, which represents tens of thousands of businesses and members across the UK, presented preliminary findings from extensive commercial surveys assessing the current state of the UK-EU trade relationship.

  Highlighting where trade friction persists, he detailed businesses' reported operational challenges and offered pragmatic recommendations for effective advocacy. Reflecting on his participation at the German-British Business Summit in Berlin on 29 April 2026, he emphasised his strong commitment to supporting and strengthening bilateral economic ties, while actively encouraging all trade stakeholders to take part in ongoing surveys and collaborative initiatives to overcome regulatory hurdles.

- **Isabel Menger**, Head of Global Customs & Global Logistics, Hugo Boss AG (online). Joining online, Ms Menger delivered a compelling corporate practitioner presentation titled *"Global Customs 2026: Challenges & Opportunities – British-German Trade After Brexit"*. Drawing on Hugo Boss's extensive retail and fashion operations, she examined the structural shift from the 2016 referendum to the post-Brexit operating reality under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

  Key insights & operational strategies shared:

  - The Real Organisational Change: She explained that Brexit forced a complete overhaul of the UK sales organisation, requiring dedicated customs and logistics setups spanning database management (tariff codes and procedures), execution (broker interfaces, compliance checks, and FTA utilisation), and e-commerce controls (Importer of Record, returns handling, and Northern Ireland exceptions).
  - The "Big Six" Foreign Trade Challenges: She detailed the simultaneous constraints faced across physical border journeys (France exit confirmations, Calais/Dover bottlenecks, and specialised textile

transport availability), financial flows (intercompany customs-value models), complex authorisations and registrations, and distinctive Northern Ireland rules.

- Building a New Operating Model: To overcome these hurdles, Hugo Boss implemented four structural changes: establishing dedicated customs and logistics ownership, setting up a UK e-commerce fulfilment location to resolve delivery-time pressures, utilising direct delivery flows to unlock FTA duty savings, and deploying advanced digital execution systems.
- Strategic Conclusions: She concluded that Brexit was not a one-off regulatory adjustment but a permanently higher customs baseline, noting that while the UK benefits from FTAs, no trade agreement can fully replace the efficiency of the EU Single Market. Notably, this transformation led Hugo Boss to implement its most advanced group-wide customs clearance system directly in the UK.

- **Robert Hina**, Group Customs Compliance Manager at Sumitomo Electric Wiring Systems (Europe) Ltd. Drawing on his extensive experience managing compliance for a major Tier-1 automotive supplier, Mr Hina delivered grounded, technical insights into complex automotive and manufacturing supply chains.

  He illustrated how components and raw materials continuously crisscross borders across the UK, Europe, and North Africa, moving from external origins into European processing hubs, onward to assembly, and back through the UK supply chain, creating an exceptionally high-compliance environment. He emphasised that optimising costs from a rules-of-origin and cumulation perspective requires sophisticated customs expertise that smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) simply cannot navigate alone.

  While his organisation successfully manages these complexities thanks to an elite internal compliance team, smaller suppliers remain entirely lost.

  Adding regulatory burdens such as CBAM, EUDR, PPWR, and F-gas compliance creates overwhelming red tape and bureaucracy.

  He concluded with a powerful call to action: if European and British governments are genuinely serious about reducing red tape, they cannot afford to overlook customs; instead, they should explore a dedicated, joint trade facilitation programme specifically designed to overcome existing post-Brexit friction.

- **George Riddell**, Managing Director at Goyder Ltd, former Director for Trade Strategy at EY. Bringing elite strategic consultancy experience, Mr Riddell delivered a penetrating analysis of the challenges ahead for both British and German businesses. Addressing these together will provide better opportunities and solutions.

  He expanded the discussion to a broader trade perspective, urging UK companies to prepare for the operational impacts of the sweeping EU Customs Reform.

  He said UK businesses trading with or through the European Union cannot treat the reform as a purely internal EU matter; instead, the phased rollout, including the new EU Data Hub, e-commerce liabilities, and stricter enforcement mechanisms, will directly reshape cross-border obligations for British firms.

  He stressed that companies must proactively prepare for dual-track data environments and shifting regulatory baselines, underscoring that strategic operational restructuring is essential to survive and compete in the post-Brexit trading landscape.

Part 2: Extended Boardroom Discussion on "Building Effective Customs and Trade Compliance Programmes"

Following these initial comments, the boardroom discussion examined how leading organisations establish and

maintain comprehensive customs compliance programmes that manage risk, support operational performance, and adapt continuously to changing regulatory requirements, with active participation from both the in-person boardroom and the online audience.

Moderator **Patrick Nieveler,** Managing Director, PASANI Academy GmbH, was unfortunately unable to attend, so Arne Mielken managed the discussions.

Contributions will be received from:

- **Jane Stanley**, Director at Francis Howard Stanley Partnership LLP, former Head of Customs, Lidl UK. Drawing on her extensive retail compliance experience, Ms Stanley emphasised that for high-volume importers, successful customs operations depend on rigorous processes, precise procedures, high-quality data, and top-level commitment to treating customs as strategic, not an afterthought.

  Rather than sitting at the end of the supply chain merely as a necessary operational burden, customs functions must be recognised as a vital strategic asset and integrated much earlier into the planning stages of supply chain design.

  She highlighted that customs genuinely enables trade and ensures on-time delivery, but only when businesses and government fully recognise its role as a strategic enablet. She concluded by urging all stakeholders to help raise the profile of customs departments and elevate their strategic role in driving economic growth.

- **Lesley Batchelor**, CBE, Chair of the Paddy Ashdown Centre for Global Affairs, former Director General of the Institute of Export & International Trade. Championing professional skills development, Dame Lesley Batchelor argued that bridging the customs competence gap through targeted training is the single best investment an organisation can make.

  Building on the importance of education and training, she discussed the transformative impact of artificial intelligence, noting that customs professionals must learn to use AI ethically and effectively. She stressed that companies urgently need a clear strategy for integrating AI into customs and trade, determining how technology can assist without replacing human expertise while establishing necessary operational guardrails.

  Emphasizing that businesses of all sizes must treat AI adoption and its surrounding rules as an immediate necessity, she urged that this topic be added as a priority item to future customs agendas and board discussions. She concluded by calling for clear government guidance and support on official AI policy, specifically clarifying what automation means for customs clearance and international trade flows.

- Looking ahead to the future of the profession, **Robert Hina** raised a critical concern regarding expertise, knowledge, and talent development: if artificial intelligence effectively absorbs the work of junior staff, where will the next generation of customs leaders come from? He emphasised that AIcannot simulate or generate rrealoperational customs and cross-border trade experience;;it must be lived through hands-on practice. If entry-level roles are entirely automated, the industry risks hollowing out the talent pipeline required to manage complex international supply chains. Consequently, he reminded companies that even today, no AI model can ever replace genuine human experience, professional judgment, and cross-border interpersonal relationships.

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- **Philip Trouwen** emphasised that specialised customs software can powerfully support data quality, processes, and procedures, particularly in light of the forthcoming EU Customs Data Hub. Recalling the traditional maxim of "garbage in, garbage out," Philip stressed that all stakeholders (including British businesses) must continue to clean data, improve data quality, and ensure readiness for the EU

Customs Data Hub.

While acknowledging that software solutions and artificial intelligence can assist to an extent, human expertise remains indispensable for final agreement, validation, and judgment. In a practical reminder, the speaker urged businesses to prioritise data-cleansing exercises, ensuring core trade data remains accurate, complete, and timely.

- **William Bain**, Head of Trade Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, spoke on the vital role of trade associations in shaping policy and legislation. Mr Bain emphasised that trade bodies remain critically important as a bridge between industry and government.

  He highlighted the ongoing need for active engagement with British and European counterparts, ensuring businesses collaborate across borders to develop practical solutions to shared trade problems.

  He also stressed the need to maintain strong channels so HMRC hears directly about operational challenges businesses face at the EU and German levels, and so European authorities understand the realities on the ground in Britain, fostering a continuous, two-way dialogue to ease trade friction.

Executive Synthesis: The Lessons That Matter

Jeremy White, leading UK barrister specialising in international trade and Customs & Excise law, brought the the summit's comprehensive deliberations to a focused close. Mr White delivered an insightful executive synthesis that bridged the morning's high-level strategic developments with the granular operational realities explored throughout the afternoon. He emphasised that navigating the post-Brexit trading landscape across the UK, Germany, and the wider European Union requires a fundamental shift in mindset and governance.

Synthesising the core legal and commercial takeaways, he highlighted the following imperative conclusions for businesses and policymakers:

- **Elevating Customs as a Strategic Enabler:** Customs compliance can no longer be treated as a reactive administrative checkbox at the end of the supply chain. Proactive risk management requires integrating customs considerations into the earliest stages of supply chain design, backed by a firm commitment from corporate leadership to prevent costly border friction and secure on-time delivery.

- **Anticipating Regulatory Overhauls:** UK businesses trading with or through the EU must recognise that upcoming transformations, such as the phased rollout of the EU Customs Data Hub, shifting e-commerce liabilities, and a stricter enforcement regime, are not merely internal EU matters. Organisations must prepare for dual-track data environments ("two tracks") to mitigate severe compliance exposure.

- **Prioritising Data Hygiene and Human Oversight:** As digital transformation accelerates, data accuracy, completeness, and timeliness remain paramount under the timeless rule of "garbage in, garbage out." While specialised software and artificial intelligence provide powerful support, human validation, legal judgment, and robust data-cleansing exercises are indispensable.

- **Bridging the SME Divide and Cutting Red Tape:** While major multinational enterprises possess the resources to maintain elite compliance teams, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face mounting isolation. Auxiliary regulatory layers such as CBAM, EUDR, PPWR, and F-gas compliance further compound this challenge, reinforcing the urgent need for dedicated, joint trade facilitation programmes between British and European authorities.

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- **Safeguarding the Professional Talent Pipeline:** While artificial intelligence streamlines routine tasks, it threatens to automate entry-level roles, risking the future pipeline of experienced customs managers. Mr White underscored that true operational expertise cannot be simulated by AI; it must be lived through hands-on practice, anchored by human experience and cross-border interpersonal relationships.

- **Leveraging Bilateral Dialogue:** Trade associations and structured channels with public bodies like HMRC remain critical bridges between industry and government. Maintaining continuous two-way communication is vital to ensuring that regulatory authorities understand real-world operational challenges and that businesses can effectively navigate ongoing regulatory divergence.

Ultimately, Mr White concluded that proactive legal awareness, rigorous internal controls, and active stakeholder engagement are vital tools for transforming trade compliance from an operational burden into a true strategic competitive advantage.

Final Reflections and Closing Remarks

Closing the inaugural summit, Dr Wolffgang and Mr Mielken reflected on the day's depth and reiterated that continued, open dialogue among business practitioners, legal experts, and public authorities remains the cornerstone of successful international trade. They wondered:

- What went well?
- What can be improved?
- Should we do it again next year?
- If yes, where?
- If yes, what should be discussed?
- If yes, who should speak?

Closing Drinks Reception – Courtesy of MIC GmbH. The formal proceedings concluded with a vibrant networking reception, hosted by MIC GmbH at the traditional British *Edgar Wallace Pub*, allowing delegates to forge lasting professional connections.

Conclusion

The inaugural German-British Customs Summit 2026 proved a tour de force and a must-attend event on the international trade calendar.

By bringing together government authorities, leading legal minds, academic leaders, software pioneers, and senior supply chain executives from industry giants, the summit achieved a rare feat: flawlessly bridging theory and practice across the UK, Germany, and the EU.

For the bilateral economic relationship, the event proved that despite post-Brexit complexities and evolving regulatory frameworks, trade remains deeply resilient and dynamic.

Crucially, the summit sent an uncompromising message: customs cannot be an afterthought; ignoring the administrative burden and failing to address border friction within current institutional frameworks directly hampers trade growth.

Ultimately, the event equipped participants with the vital updates, tools, and professional networks required to transform trade compliance from an operational challenge into a strategic competitive advantage.

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