

Sunak woos business leaders at summit amid Labour charm offensive

Rishi Sunak will court hundreds of Britain's leading bosses at a summit this month that will be seen as an attempt to wrest back momentum from Keir Starmer's efforts to present Labour as the new party of business.

Sky News has learnt that the prime minister, the chancellor Jeremy Hunt, and Kemi Badenoch, the business and trade secretary, will appear at an event in London called Business Connect.

According to a copy of the invitation seen by Sky News, the conference will also feature appearances from other Cabinet ministers.

"Business Connect is an invitation-only conference that will focus on our priority to grow the economy," it said.

"Together with business leaders from across the UK, we will discuss how to build a competitive pro-enterprise environment that supports growth through innovation."

Whitehall sources denied the summit had been pulled together at short notice, saying it was the ideal moment, in the aftermath of Mr Hunt's Budget, to gather business leaders and ministers.

The recent unveiling of the Windsor Framework to provide certainty over the UK's post-Brexit trading environment, and recent economic data represented important milestones for the UK economy, they added.

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Under Mr Starmer, Labour has been trying to reposition itself in the eyes of traditionally Tory-supporting bosses, and has won qualified endorsements from the likes of John Allan, the Tesco chairman, and Paul Drechsler, the former CBI president.

It recently emerged that the party was charging £15,000 for membership of the Labour Business network – an initiative that marks a clear dividing line with his predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn.

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Responding to an enquiry from Sky News, a No10 spokesperson said: "One of the Prime Minister's five priorities is to grow the economy, and the Business Connect conference later this month is just one of a number of ways the government is engaging with key businesses and entrepreneurs across the UK to deliver on that ambition."