



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP  
Chair, Committee on the Future Relationship  
with the European Union  
House of Commons  
London, SW1A 0AA

Our reference: MC2020/05753

26 May 2020

Dear Hilary,

During the course of my evidence on 27 April, there were a handful of areas where I committed to providing further information. I will address those areas in turn.

### **Customs Agents**

The UK has a well-established industry of customs intermediaries which serve British businesses trading outside the EU. The sector is made up of a number of different business models including specific customs agents, freight forwarders and fast parcel operators - all of which will require varied numbers of staff to handle different declaration types. It is therefore not possible to put a number on agents required.

While there is no central government estimate for agents required, we are monitoring business preparation closely. Government support has been designed to meet the needs of the sector to build capacity by covering training and IT innovation, as well as recruitment. £34m of funding has already been made available, including £31m in grants to support training, improvements in IT and recruitment of customs agents; and £3m for learning providers to make training courses available. To date, the grants scheme has been successful in providing funding for nearly 20,000 training courses, in addition to the 870 training courses delivered by the online customs academy, 14,500 pieces of IT kit, and recruitment costs for new staff. We are continuing to work closely with industry to consider what additional support is needed and I will update this Committee further as appropriate.

### **Common Frameworks Quarterly Report**

The seventh European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks statutory report was published on 20 May 2020, covering the reporting period to 25 March 2020.

### **Trade talks with the US**

As you will be aware, on 5 May, the Secretary of State for International Trade, Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, and the United States Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, announced the formal launch of trade agreement negotiations between the U.S. and the UK. They agreed an ambitious timetable for virtual talks.

In light of the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic, the first round of negotiations were conducted virtually, with US and UK negotiators engaging in discussions over two weeks in nearly 30 different negotiating groups.

An FTA is a priority for both countries and we share a commitment to secure an ambitious agreement. We are undertaking negotiations at an accelerated pace and have committed the resources necessary to progress quickly.

With regards to deterring people from crossing the Channel in small boats (Q217), my Right Honourable Friend, the Home Secretary will respond directly to you with further information.

This Government remains committed to making sure Parliament continues to be fully informed on the progress of negotiations, the work of the Joint Committee and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. As set out in my evidence, I will continue to provide further updates to both Parliament, and the Committee, in due course.

**Yours,**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail.

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
and Minister for the Cabinet Office**