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Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP  
House of Commons  
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Dear Hilary,

Thank you for your letter of 9 June, following my appearance in front of the Committee. On 16 June, I updated the House on the High Level Meeting that took place on 15 June. An annex to the Terms of Reference for negotiations is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) which sets out detail on the intensified talks process, including dates and locations of meetings.

You asked about support for the customs intermediary sector. The Government has now announced a package of £84 million covering training and IT equipment, as well as recruitment. The £34 million has funded approximately 20,000 training courses; the creation of a new UK Customs Academy; and over 14,500 pieces of IT equipment. As I set out in my letter to the Committee on 26 May it is not possible to specify the total customs agents required as the sector is varied. On 12 June the Government announced a sovereign decision on the staged introduction of new border controls following the end of the transition period on 31 December. This pragmatic approach will give industry extra time to prepare for the new procedures.

You asked about goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. I note you had the opportunity to question me on this topic at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. We set out details of our policy in our Command Paper, and have committed to publishing further guidance later this month. We have established the Business Engagement Forum to help us better listen to the concerns of businesses in Northern Ireland.

You asked about goods moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. For the overwhelming majority of goods there will be no change, save where traders wish to use special procedures like duty suspense, for which facilitations will be available. The only exceptions apply to specific international obligations - for example rough diamonds or endangered species. There has been one movement of rough diamonds from Northern Ireland to Great Britain in the last 15 years.

You asked about the economic impact of our future UK-EU relationship. This issue has been much debated in the last four years and there are many economic studies of the economic impact of the move from EU membership to a Free Trade Agreement. These vary according to factors such as the models used, timescales covered, and the weight given to different factors. No single number or scenario can capture that complexity. That is why we proposed in February that we would invite contributions from economists and academics, businesses and civil society groups. We had hoped that this consultation would have launched by now, but it was delayed as a result

of COVID-19, which is obviously having substantial economic impacts. We will update about this work in due course.

You asked about the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC). Since the 2019 General Election, JMC (EN) has met three times, most recently on 21 May, where negotiations were discussed in detail with David Frost in attendance. The JMC(EN) will meet this Thursday and at regular intervals throughout the rest of the year. Feedback from JMC(EN) meetings, and our wider ministerial and official engagement between the four nations, has been invaluable in developing our policy. However, in line with the obligations under the Ministerial Code, details on the process of collective agreement are not normally disclosed and therefore it is inappropriate for me to outline how our internal policy decisions have changed over time.

We have been engaging closely with business and details of ministerial engagement with external individuals and organisations are published regularly. We have now published our border operating model which provides guidance to business and industry to prepare for the introduction of customs controls. We will continue to engage closely with business and industry to ensure the operating model provides the guidance and information they require.

I would also like to provide information on staffing levels in the teams dealing directly with our exit from the EU. Task Force Europe's headcount is now 46 individuals - and was 49 in February. The Transition Task Force's headcount is now 65 - and was 41 in February. Work on negotiations is of course a cross-Whitehall effort and accordingly involves a far greater number of staff overall than those just in TFE or TTF. For example, more than a hundred UK staff have been involved in recent full negotiating rounds.

**With every good wish,**

*and hope this is helpful,  
Ms. [Signature]*

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