



Chloe Smith MP  
Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution  
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

The Baroness Andrews OBE  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

Lords

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Dear Baroness Andrews,

Thank you for your letter of 17 June regarding the Government's response to your Committee's report on Common Frameworks and the letter from Julia Lopez MP on cross-cutting issues.

As UK Common Frameworks are 'ways of working' documents rather than policy documents themselves, we have agreed with the Devolved Administrations that stakeholder engagement will be designed to take account of the unique nature of each individual Framework. The Cabinet Office has consistently emphasised the importance of effective stakeholder engagement to ensure that those directly affected by a Framework have the opportunity to feed into its development. Guidance to departments is likely to cover (the following is not exhaustive): best practice for committee engagement, post-implementation technical stakeholder engagement, how Frameworks will relate to the revised IGR architecture once agreed, the role of the centre, and reviewing Frameworks classified as 'No Framework Required'. Guidance will likely be light-touch rather than prescriptive, and since each individual Framework is being developed by a UK Government department together with their Devolved Administration counterparts, I consider that it would be appropriate for the joint policy teams to decide on the most effective form of stakeholder engagement in the round. This may include in-person engagement sessions with a wide range of stakeholders, as undertaken for the Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene Law Framework, or more targeted written consultation as undertaken for the Specified Quantities and Packaged Goods Legislation Framework.

The Cabinet Office is developing additional guidance to support departments in continuing to effectively engage stakeholders throughout any future development of Frameworks. This guidance will continue to stress the importance of effective stakeholder engagement during any significant future amendments to Frameworks.

With regard to publishing further Frameworks, I can confirm the UK Government has been actively engaging with the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) at both ministerial and official level to discuss clearance for provisional Frameworks as a matter of priority. I have written directly to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and my colleague, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has maintained regular contact with senior NIE ministers. Cabinet Office officials, including Second Permanent Secretary Sue Gray, continue to work closely with the Executive to aid the clearance process. I would like to highlight the government's commitment to transparency in the Common Frameworks Programme, and to restate my aim of making provisional Frameworks

available once provisional confirmation has been obtained.

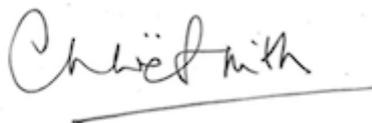
You asked which Frameworks might be subject to reporting on divergence under the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol. The Protocol requires the EU, through the Joint Consultative Working Group (JCWG) on the implementation of the Protocol, to inform the UK of planned new EU legislation within scope of the Protocol, including those that amend or replace the EU legislation listed in the Protocol Annexes. We are continuing to work with the EU to bed in these JCWG processes which give advance notice of potential EU-driven divergence. The significance of any divergence under the Protocol will vary significantly from case to case and, as you note, will be a matter for the relevant Framework owning departments and their Devolved Administration counterparts to consider.

I am pleased to be able to update you on a specific exercise which was conducted recently for the Nutrition Labelling Composition and Standards (NLCS) Framework, in which the Committee has previously expressed an interest. The NLCS policy group and the UKG and devolved administration Frameworks teams ran two scenarios through NLCS' decision making and dispute resolution processes to test its ability to manage proposals potentially causing intra-UK divergence. The implications of the Protocol were fully considered in the context of the two scenarios. Overall, the exercise indicated that the NLCS Framework was working well on an interim basis at official level and the policy group demonstrated good awareness of the policy cross-cutting issues whilst being keen to identify solutions that best worked for all, enabling the UK to manage potential divergence proposals whether they be EU or GB driven.

I can assure the Committee that my officials and officials in the Devolved Administrations continue to work in partnership to make progress on the cross-cutting issues impacting on Framework development, including by identifying where Frameworks are more or less impacted by these issues and adapting the approach taken accordingly. The breadth, complexity and political profile of the cross-cutting issues, and the fact that the Frameworks programme is a four-way, consensus-driven undertaking, means that it is not possible to estimate when these issues might be fully resolved. However, I would be happy to update the Committee as and when these issues are resolved.

I look forward to appearing before your Committee on 13 July, and would be happy to answer any further questions then.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chloe Smith', is written over a horizontal line.

**Chloe Smith MP**  
**Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution**