

BCC comments on trade and customs white papers

Commenting on the publication of the trade and customs white papers, Anastassia Beliakova, Head of Trade Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“While the publication of the Trade White Paper is a first step toward the establishment of a independent UK trade policy, most businesses operating internationally are more impatient for answers on the fundamental question of the UK’s future trading relationship with the European Union.

“Logically, ministers must take powers to conduct trade negotiations, set out how they will work with Parliament and with business, and put a trade remedies framework in place to protect UK interests – and the Bill is a critical instrument to establish all of this. Beyond this, the immediate objective of the UK’s trade policy must be to replicate the dozens of free trade agreements the UK currently benefits from as part of the EU. Preserving our firms’ existing levels of market access is a bigger immediate priority to most than the hypothetical gains to be had from opening negotiations with other countries, including the USA.

“What’s more, trade policy cannot exist in isolation. Unless trade policy is fully co-ordinated with the long-touted Industrial Strategy, tax policy and export support, the government’s vision of a Global Britain will be little more than empty rhetoric.

“The Customs White Paper provides helpful detail on the contingency planning the government is coordinating in the event of ‘no deal’, and it is encouraging that our proposals on customs, including pre-notification and inland clearance, have been heard loud and clear.

“However, only 2% of our members support leaving without a deal. Businesses cannot afford to face excessive delays or administration for new customs checks, and we urge the UK and the EU to reach an agreement that minimises burdens as much as possible.

“Businesses still await further detail on the UK’s future VAT regime, the streamlining of customs processes, as well as how much regulatory alignment the UK intends to pursue with the EU in the future. The latter will have significant implications for the scope and focus of any future independent trade deals. After all, every trade negotiation is a trade-off between sovereignty and market access.”

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Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful

network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

Media contacts:

Allan Williams – Head of Press and Communications

020 7654 5812 / 07920583381

Orla Hennessy – Press and Communications Officer

020 7654 5813 / 07825746812