

The Attorney General writes me a letter

I know some of you thought it odd that the Attorney did not reply to my letter, but I eventually got a reply from the Secretary of State for exiting the EU. You will be pleased to know that yesterday I did also get a reply from the Attorney himself, so any criticism on that score is misfounded.

I am used to government departments sending letters to other government departments for reply. I am also used to the idea of collective responsibility, so I assume the government department that sent it to another agrees completely with the answer the responding department offers, and has had an opportunity to comment on the line taken when the matters covered were settled by government or when the letter is answered.

I thought I should share the Attorney's letter with you as people will want to make up their own minds about the balance of argument on this important constitutional matter.

The Attorney wrote:

"I am writing further to your emails of 14 and 18 April concerning the Withdrawal Agreement.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has now responded to your queries on behalf of the Department for Exiting the European Union, which is the department responsible for overseeing negotiations to leave the EU and establishing the future relationship between the EU and the UK. I have seen the letter dated 14 May 2019, the substantive contents of which I agree with."

This is an unusual letter, as normally the government only sends one reply to a query. It is interesting that it explains to me how the negotiations over the EU are conducted without mentioning the prominent roles of the Prime Minister, Mr Robbins and the Cabinet Office who I thought had been leading the talks. It is also interesting because it does not simply say the Attorney agrees with the government's letter, but he agrees with "the substantive contents" which are not separately identified.