



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
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The benefits of Brexit?

You will I'm sure be aware that a new 'Brexit Freedoms' Bill will be brought forward in the coming weeks by the Government to make it easier to amend retained EU law. At present, reforming and repealing EU law requires primary legislation, which can take several years. Whilst the exact detail of this new bill is yet to be fleshed out, the Government has suggested that 'new legislation will ensure that changes can be made more easily, so that the UK can capitalise on Brexit freedoms more quickly'.

Earlier this week, the Government published a new Policy Paper entitled, '*Benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU*', two years to the day after the UK formally left the EU. In an attempt to regain control of the political agenda, the Prime Minister is marking two years since the UK officially left the EU with a paper detailing 'the benefits of Brexit'. In his foreword, Boris Johnson calls this "an exciting time" for the UK, adding that "the bolder we are, the greater the gains will be for us all".

The three-part document lists the Government's achievement to date – mostly around the promises made during the 2016 referendum campaign on 'taking back control' of money, borders and law making but also other 'gimmicky' pledges, such as the return of blue passports, the review of the EU ban on imperial measurements, and the use of the crown stamp – while also setting out how the Government intends to reform the regulatory system, as well as its vision for the future of policy areas, processes and sectors where it will be changing its approach owing to Brexit.

On the regulatory side, which is, of course, something of significant interest to the HFMA and this industry, the paper praises the UK's regulatory system as 'recognised globally', adding that the Government



wants to raise the bar 'even higher' as the UK embraces its newfound freedoms outside of the EU and position itself as a 'global hub for innovation and a science and technology superpower'. While much of the referendum campaign painted the 'Leave' proposition as merely seeking a race to the bottom which would oversee a bonfire of regulations, this document makes clear the UK will seek to set high standards at home, while also act as a leader abroad engaging in 'robust regulatory diplomacy'. Front of mind will be how these new freedoms will be able to strengthen UK markets while also prioritising the interests of UK businesses and consumers.

While it will be derided by many as a distraction at a time of personal political jeopardy for the Prime Minister, this paper shows the number of areas the Government can tangibly change EU regulations and repurpose them to gain both an economic advantage for the UK and,

more broadly, political advantages for the Conservative Party. However, this ambitious programme of reform will require a lot of focus for it to be delivered – it remains unclear whether this Government has enough political capital to take it forward in the months and years to come.

After outlining the Government's achievements since the UK left the EU, the bulk of the paper examines how the UK will reform and create a better regulation system post Brexit across a number of areas. The paper seeks to demonstrate the Government's vision for future policy areas, processes, and sectors where they plan to adapt post Brexit. These are summarised under six broad themes: *The Best Regulated Economy in the World; Science, Data and Technology; Business & Industry; Infrastructure and Levelling Up; Climate, the Environment & Agriculture; and Global Britain*.

A couple of these themes are particularly relevant for us in this industry. The first relates to

Regulatory Vision, and the paper acknowledges that our regulatory system is recognised globally, and that the Government will use new freedoms to follow a distinctive approach based on UK law, protected by independent UK regulators, and designed to strengthen UK markets.

And in relation to Business and Industry, there is recognition for the UK's vital food and drink sector. The paper calls for a food system that empowers people, and the Food Strategy White Paper in the coming weeks will set out plans to empower people to make healthy and sustainable food choices. The Government will consider optimising food information, such as that on labelling, to support consumers make informed choices, speaks of remaining at the forefront of cutting-edge research and innovation, and refers to reviewing the regulation of novel foods to support this. It charges the Food Standards Agency with updating the process of approving novel foods to create a system that is the best in the world for innovators, investors and consumers.

Whilst it is easy to say that this is all bluster and rhetoric, in part perhaps designed to divert attention away from issues the Government faces closer to home right now, I like to think that the overarching objectives remain consistent with the need for a regulatory system for food and drink in the UK that is pragmatic, proportionate and appropriate, and better recognises our specific national needs and best interests. **hfb**

This is a great example of the work that we undertake at the HFMA on behalf of 140-plus member companies. If your company is not in membership and you would like to help us in our efforts to protect this great industry and benefit from the gold-standard services we provide, you should join the HFMA at the earliest opportunity. To learn more about our activities, please contact graham@hfma.co.uk

HFMA membership is vital to ensure that your company keeps abreast of the fast-changing regulatory environment. The HFMA is the UK's best source of information and most effective defender of our industry's interests. To help the HFMA defend your business at this most critical time contact hfma@hfma.co.uk or call 020 8481 7100.

