

News story: Brexit Minister visits university and businesses in Northern Ireland

Minister Robin Walker has heard directly from people, groups and businesses in Northern Ireland about the opportunities and challenges of Brexit, as part of the Government's ongoing commitment to work with all parts of the UK on our withdrawal.

Visiting alongside Northern Ireland Minister Chloe Smith, Robin Walker met representatives from a number of key sectors, including higher education and business. The trip took in Ulster University's Belfast campus, recycling and waste management company Re-Gen Waste in Newry, a visit to the border, and the CBI's under-35s forum for promising future business leaders.

The Minister also saw the regeneration of Belfast Harbour and heard how Belfast is becoming a major hub for inward investment. It is the world's number one international investment location for financial services technology and cyber security firms, and has seen 1,200 new cyber security related jobs created over the past five years.

The Minister used the visit to hear first hand about the opportunities and challenges that the UK's exit from the EU could present to Northern Ireland, and to reiterate the Government's commitment to ensuring the specific interests of Northern Ireland are a priority in the talks. The visit is part of a wider programme of engagement with all parts of the UK on Brexit, and builds on previous visits to Northern Ireland by Minister Robin Walker and Secretary of State David Davis to discuss our EU withdrawal.

The Government has published a comprehensive paper which outlines the UK's position on addressing the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland and the land border with Ireland. It makes clear the Government's commitment to avoiding any physical infrastructure at the border.

Minister for Exiting the EU, Robin Walker said:

As we look to leave the EU, we've been absolutely clear that we want to hear from people and businesses across all parts of the UK about the specific opportunities and challenges Brexit represents to them.

Because of its land border and shared history with Ireland, Northern Ireland of course has unique issues relating to Brexit that we've committed to address as a priority. That's why we've set out our proposals to ensure we protect the Belfast Agreement in the negotiations, and ensure the land border is as seamless and frictionless as possible for people and businesses.

I've had the chance to speak with a wide range of groups during this trip – and it's an opportunity that's proved invaluable. I had the pleasure of meeting with some of Belfast's brightest young business leaders, who demonstrated to me the breadth of talent and opportunity the City has to offer. It is clear that Belfast is putting itself on the map as a hub for innovation and foreign direct investment. We want to ensure this trend continues – delivering EU exit in a way that works for all parts of the UK.

Northern Ireland Minister Chloe Smith said:

The UK Government is completely committed to finding a practical solution for the movement of people and goods across the border, as we recognise the unique economic, historical and geographical circumstances between Northern Ireland and Ireland. We are clear we do not want any obstacles between the UK and our closest trading partner, Ireland.

The Government is working for a successful outcome that brings more economic opportunities for the future of everyone in Northern Ireland and preserves stability in Northern Ireland.