

EU lose out on UK imports to rest of world

The first quarter trade figures for the UK show a sharp decline in the trade deficit, Much of this relates to higher stock levels last year which needed using up. The figures also show, however, some shift in our pattern of imports, bringing in less from the EU and more from the rest of the world. This probably reflects the aggressive and unhelpful stance of the EU over trade matters.

If we compare the month of March 2021 with March 2019 before the pandemic disrupted economies and trade we see a £1.3bn fall in imports of EU miscellaneous manufactures, a £2.8bn fall in imports of EU machinery and transport items, a £0.4bn fall in EU food and a £2bn fall in EU chemicals. In contrast the same period sees a rise of £0.2bn in rest of the world imported miscellaneous manufactures, a much smaller £0.5bn fall in rest of the world machinery and transport, a £0.1bn increase in rest of the world food and a £0.6bn increase in rest of the world chemical imports. It is always a better idea to be helpful to customers, as the rest of the world is demonstrating.

Left, right and the true divides in UK politics

The left-right analysis stemmed from the division of the French National Assembly in to supporters of the King and supporters of the Revolution, with the King's people sitting to the right and the revolutionaries to the left. As some have mentioned here it no longer represents a great way of explaining the complex positions and views of modern political parties.

Today in the UK as we can see from recent election results there is still a divide between Remain and Leave. Maybe a quarter of the country still regrets the decision to leave the EU and actively encourages the Lib Dems, SNP and Labour to adopt negative tactics against all things related to Brexit instead of accepting the democratic verdict. Labour's decision to send a Remain former MP who had done his bit to derail and delay Brexit into Hartlepool where most people want Brexit was a needless added difficulty for the party in that important by election. All the time these Opposition parties fight the will of the people and the reality that we are now out they will find it very difficult to build more support and creep towards a majority.

The SNP are trying to divide the country over whether the Union of the UK should remain or whether it is time to split up the UK. The EU from outside is also seeking to split the UK with its one sided, heavy handed and

legalistic approach to Northern Ireland relations with the Republic. None of these identity issues, Brexit/Union/EU relations is a right/left matter, with people from all parts of the so called right-left spectrum holding differing views on identity. We now know people have been willing to move their vote from Labour and Lib Dems to Brexit parties and then to Conservatives owing to the refusal of Labour and the Lib Dems to back and help Brexit. In Scotland Some Conservative and Labour voters were voting tactically for each other to support the Union.

A third important division in our country is between lovers of liberty and supporters of more government control. There are some lovers of liberty on the left, as well as many on the right. There is an authoritarian left and a civil libertarian left, just as there is a law and order right and a freedom loving right. CV 19 has brought this out, with some supporting prolonged lockdown and precise instructions over how we should lead our lives whilst others support people making more of their own judgements. Again traditional party lines do not reflect this division.

Meanwhile the main parties agree on a lot. They agree about climate change and the need to pursue net zero. They agree about membership of NATO, the desirability of the so called international rules based order, and the need to encourage tolerance and understanding for all people whatever their background. They agree about the importance of the NHS and free schooling. Challenger parties to these views have attracted very little support.

There needs to be a clear division on economic policy, with Conservatives backing growth through setting competitive tax rates, encouraging free enterprise, backing self employment and going for growth. The next few months are best spent securing a strong recovery, helping create many more well paid jobs and bringing home Brexit wins.

[Update on Step 3 of our Covid-19 Response](#)

Dear John

Update on Step 3 of our Covid-19 Response

I want to thank you and your constituents for your patience and sacrifices that continue to be made as we progress along our Roadmap. Businesses, pubs, and restaurants have been waiting to welcome customers back through their doors; grandparents have endured months without seeing their grandchildren; weddings have been postponed; funerals sadly constrained; and religious festivals such as Eid are yet again facing restrictions.

I want to thank everyone because our collective efforts have so visibly paid

off, giving us the time to vaccinate more than two thirds of all adults across the UK. More than one third – nearly 18 million people – have also received their second dose. This has unquestionably saved many lives.

It is thanks to these efforts that I was able to confirm today that we have met our four tests for further easing lockdown in England. With deaths and hospitalisations at their lowest levels since July, and the UK's four Chief Medical Officers today agreeing a reduction in the alert level, the data now support moving to Step 3 in England from Monday 17 May.

As a reminder, these tests are:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
- Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by a new Variants of Concern.

This means the rule of six or two households that has applied outdoors will now apply indoors – and the limit for outdoor meetings will increase to 30. From next Monday, we will be able to sit inside a pub or restaurant; we will be able to go to the cinema; and children will be able to use in door play areas. We are reopening hotels, hostels, and B&Bs and reopening the doors of our theatres, concert halls, and business conference centres. We will unlock the turnstiles of our sports stadia, subject to capacity limits.

From next week groups of up to six people or two households will be able to travel within the UK and stay overnight, meaning schools and colleges will also be able to organise trips with overnight stays. We will no longer require face coverings in classrooms – or for students in communal areas in secondary schools and colleges – and all remaining university students will be able to return to in-person teaching, where they should be tested twice a week.

We will increase the number of named visitors for those in care homes from two to five, and residents will have greater freedoms to leave their homes without having to isolate on their return.

This unlocking amounts to a considerable step on our Roadmap back to normality. To give businesses time to prepare, I will be setting out our approach to moving to Step 4 later this month, including the conclusions of our reviews on domestic certification and social distancing.

Today, we are taking a step towards that moment when we learn to live responsibly with Covid – when we cease to rely on detailed Government edicts and learn to make our own decisions, based on the best scientific advice, about how best to protect our families and those around us.

From next Monday we are updating the guidance on close contact between friends and family, setting out the risks for everyone to make their own

choices.

I would urge everyone to think about the vulnerability of their loved ones – including whether they have had a vaccine, one or two doses, and whether there has been time for that vaccine to take effect.

We must encourage everyone to keep getting tested regularly and continue to follow social distancing when not with friends and family including in workplaces, shops, pubs, restaurants, and other settings.

We only have to look at the very sad situation in other countries to see the lethal potential of this virus, and we must continue to fight the spread of variants here in the UK. While we have no evidence yet to believe these variants are completely vaccine resistant, we must remain vigilant.

Today I have announced the single biggest step on our Roadmap. It will allow us all to do many things we have yearned to do. Let us protect these gains by continuing to encourage everyone to exercise cautions and common sense.

Yours ever

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
THE PRIME MINISTER

[Make it easier to get a GP appointment](#)

On a call yesterday for MPs with the Secretary of State for Health I raised the issue of GP appointments. I asked that GP surgeries should have a phone and internet booking system which allows a patient to get an on line or face to face consultation as appropriate. I have been getting complaints where a surgery requires someone to ring at a single specified time each day to see if they can get an appointment that day. In the worst cases there is great difficulty in getting through at all. NHS surgery services should allow forward booking with good phone access as many good practices already offer. I was told this is an issue which senior NHS management is working on. It would be possible for NHS England to require a minimum standard or to issue New guidance.

[The Queen's Speech debate](#)

The Queen's speech debate gives the government a great opportunity to to set out a vision of a better future for the UK, and to specify those actions

government needs to take to bring it about.

Let us assume that the overarching vision is one of recovery from the ravages of the anti pandemic policies. We will doubtless hear plenty about levelling up, and about building back better. It is important the message of Hartlepool and the other places where Conservatives polled well is understood by the government. Voters in these places aspire for a better future for themselves, their families and their towns. They are not asking for more government. They are asking for more personal and family success. They are not expecting the state to do everything for them. They want the opportunities to build their own futures. Of course they would like the state to do what only the state can do. It does need to improve the public transport and roads systems, and improve the look and use of public sector land and buildings, In some cases it needs to sell clapped out and run down public sector estate to someone who can use it better.

Much of it requires the state to do less and to let people keep more of their own money. Many want to own a home of their own. They are not looking for more social housing where they are told where to live and how the property will look and be maintained. More people want to get to retirement with a home they own and no rent bills to pay as pensioners.

Many people recognise they cannot work in a council office or a government administrative job. They want more chance to become self employed and build a decent business, or more better paid jobs in the private sector where they might get a bonus or even a share participation. They see others elsewhere make capital out of their business ventures as well as enjoying a decent income. Aspiration includes working for yourself, building some capital, getting some savings so you have more options and more freedoms.

So what policies and laws does this need? It does mean lower tax rates so people can keep more of what they earn and save. It does mean government helping business to provide more affordable homes for sale. It does mean an exercise to remove barriers and costs to setting up and running your own business. It means government using its massive buying power to source more at home and less from abroad, to encourage local business successes. It means Councils who provide good public services, keep the public realm tidy, but let the private sector get on with providing a wide array of goods and services to enrich lives and create more well paid livelihoods.